

The Beat Within

THE BEAT WITHIN • A WEEKLY PUBLICATION OF WRITING AND ART FROM THE INSIDE • VOLUME 14.11



March madness and we are not talking about the NCAA Basketball tournament that is jumping off this week, we are talking about our work and it's incredible demands. We have been mentioning to you editorial note readers in the last couple of issues of how critical this time is for us all, and how the economy is affecting our work — from the number of pages we produce each week, to cutting more pieces out of The Beat each week, to stopping the weekly Beat mailing to help alleviate the printing cost.

Well, we want to touch on cutting pieces out of the weekly. This is no joke. Some of you young writers don't get it, making it extremely easy for us — that is, until the latest Beat publication comes into your hands, and you're looking for your piece but it's not in there. Then you get angry because your work is excluded. May we ask whose fault is that? We want you to take your Beat writing seriously, because the last thing we want is for you to get bent out of shape at The Beat, by proclaiming, "I'm not writing for The Beat anymore." "The Beat is whack." "They never put my work in!" Well, what can we say? Sorry? Take a look at yourself?

Shoot, we do way too many workshops to recall why your piece was left out, or even to bring back every single piece that is not included. We try to be on top of whose work gets in and whose work is left out, but there are way more editors than just this one editor, so... with that said, let us explain again who gets in The Beat!

Those who get in The Beat are writers who step up and teach. They are writers who take the hour workshop seriously. They are the writers who ask questions and actually engage with the facilitators to double check if their work is appropriate or not.

The writers who do not get in the publication, are those who write direct messages to friends and lovers. Another type of writer who never sees his/her work in print is the kind who writes incriminating pieces, plus those who flaunt the 'hood, the gang, the game way too much for us to even include your work in the paper. Finally, the writer who writes blatant hate towards his/her peers or specific staff, as well as those who write pieces full of swear words, and those who do not even try, thinking they can get by with a lazy one or two or three sentence piece, will miss out on getting in the weekly.

Trust us, if you are a smart man/woman, you can work through this and get the same message out, but you have to do it in a respectful tactful way. It's possible! Here's a hint: show the workshop respect, show yourself respect, be honest with your ability and desires, and we bet if you did this you'd put more pressure on us to print everything that comes to us at the end of each workshop.

Before we move on to the topics, here's some exciting news, The Beat Within has been invited to begin discussions with San Bernadino County in Southern California to start possibly implementing the writing workshops in their juvenile hall. Thanks to our friend, Professor Jennifer Tilton, The Beat Within will be the guest of the University Of Redlands, as the groundwork will be layed out hopefully for a successful new chapter in our incredible story. Also, in April our colleague Lynn Peterson, who once did workshops in Santa Cruz County Juvenile Hall, has moved up to Yolo County and has taken the steps to implement The Beat in her new community. We will be visiting Lynn, and speaking to the Kiwani's Club and then onward to the Yolo County Juvenile Detention Facility to meet the staff with the goal to get all parties on the same page! Then there's the possibility of traveling to Miami Florida, yeah Miami! Can you believe it? We'll get back to you on that. For now, lets get to the topics that were discussed in our workshops prior to the writing that is featured in this current issue.

The first topic, "Hunters of illusion" – Today's Ed. Note features a long poem by a young man we first met in juvenile hall. He went on to become a Beat facilitator and colleague, and then fell to drug addiction. Now he's back in state prison. He wrote: "We are the hunters of illusion/ Who bite hard with our blind hunger at/

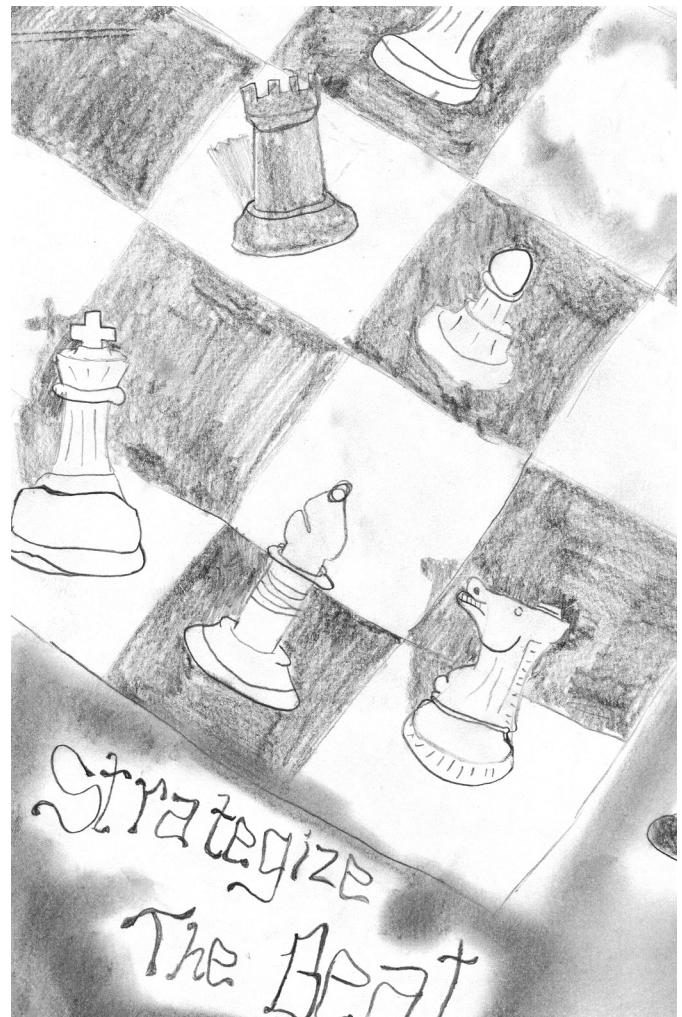
Whatever bait is before our desperate/ Misfortune." Can you explain this poem? What is the "illusion" he refers to? What kind of "bait" is dangled in front of these hungry "fish" and why do they bite? What is the "desperate misfortune" that makes them bite at illusion?

The second topic, "My most difficult challenge" - Is being in the hall the worst challenge you've ever faced? If so, how are you getting through it? Are you thinking beyond this challenge to what comes next? If this isn't the worst challenge you've ever faced, what is? What was going on in your life that made it so hard? Did anyone help you get through the difficult time? How? What did you learn from the experience?

Third topic, "Denial" - Often, when alcohol or drug abusers are confronted, they deny that they have a problem, or insist they can stop any time they want. How many of us have come home high or drunk and denied it when our mothers asked if we were high? Why do we deny it? Do you have any personal issues that you find easier to deny than to deal with? What are they? Do you have any plans to confront them?

Last but not least, the very popular, "The dumbest thing I ever did..."

OK Beat editorial note readers, lets dedicate this issue to all you few who read The Beat and give donations. Without your support we wouldn't be who we are today. Thanks for your support and kindness this year and in years past. Your support does not go unnoticed.



The Beat Within, a weekly newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth, is published by Pacific News Service.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our communities already—we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

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Art: Much props to everyone for the great art this week.

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www.thebeatwithin.org

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Do I Exist

Am I amazing
as a young Black man?
Am I a man?
You would know if you met me
but that would be hard
since I've never met myself.
Is it true that once you're a liar
you're always a liar?
Or is it possible to change?
Is change forgetting to be considerate
of who I am?
Is change a powerful word
I change my clothes, my shoes, my socks my underwear
but is it that significant
Who else needs to change
doesn't everyone?
Why am I as a Black man, not equal?
Why is it that no one can tell that I'm hurting?
Are my feelings real?
Do they exist
or am I just imagining it all.
Whose feelings are real
are we all feeling the same thing?
I have a house for questions
but the answers were renovated.
Who am I?

-Tae Dump, Alameda

From The Beat: You ask many important questions. Sometimes people you believe in may give you answers, however what matters most is how you answer these questions yourself. Someone we admire taught that you (your self, spirit etc.) are bigger than your story or circumstances...

Hunters Of Illusion

In one sense, we're all hunters of illusion of freedom. We take bites at our freedom, and bit the dust t end up back here. We become desperate to be free, and will bite at any "bait."

Misfortune comes from all different directions, and since the hunger is so high, we'll bite at the first hook we get a chance to

-Ballard, San Francisco

From The Beat: You're right, we all bite at illusions, whether we're locked up or not. Always wanting more than we have, we are easy targets for those who manipulate our greed. (Look at the list of famous people who lost millions of dollars investing with this guy, Bernard Madoff, simply because he promised huge returns.)

It's In God's Hands

Man, what's good with The Beat? Well, I'm about to tell y'all what I'm feeling from within. But anyway, man, I got court in three days on Friday the 27th. Man, after 18 months, this might be it. So hopefully, this my last time writing y'all. If it is, don't trip Beat, I'll be at work Monday morning! But that's all I got.

But before I go, I ask y'all to please pray for me. And to all those who stressing, I just want to say keep ya heads up and put everything in God's hands. And when you really put it in god's hands, you will feel all yo' stress lifted off yo' shoulders.

But I'm gone, y'all. Be easy.

-Low Low, San Francisco

From The Beat: We gave this a Piece Of the Week designation because we are so happy for you: You did get out, and you did come to work at The Beat, just like you promised! But there's no reason why this should be the last time writing for The Beat. You have a lot to say, and you will have a lot more as you enter college and meet new challenges. Spit some of that knowledge our way. We're pulling for you because we know you're pulling for yourself. Isn't freedom a wonderful thing!

The Spinning World

The world keeps spinning around and around it doesn't stop just because we get locked up and our life stops. We think nothing is happening on the outs but everything is the same. It keeps on going and never stops. The world is crazy out there new things keep updating and we get even worse. We have thought of changing. But we never take steps to change.

So we can't do anything but keep pushing ourselves to do better. Some ways I've thought would change me to get into the spinning of the world is to think about my love ones that's are hurting because they love me so much that they hate to see someone they love be ruining their life, another way I've thought would change me is thinking of all the good things that will happen in my life that aren't illegal.

So I keep thinking of ways to get myself into the spinning of the world and I keep on taking better steps to change my bad ways.

-Rell, Solano

From The Beat: We agree it's far better to be part of the world than stuck in a cell. Your loved ones may see your potential more clearly than you do. What are all the good things that will happen in your life? Focus on them as you step into the spin.

My Most Difficult Challenge

My most difficult challenge was a few months ago when I almost lost my mom. I was getting in a lot of trouble so I was really talking to my mom. Then I got locked up. She came to see me a few times.

Then one day my PO came to see me and told me that my mom had been stabbed. Man, I took it so hard. The hardest part was that she was lying there, almost dying, and I couldn't be there because I was locked up. What would've hurt me the most is if I did lose her, and didn't get a chance to say I loved her, or goodbye. They let me call everyday to see how she was doing. I was so happy when they let me go home. It hurt me though, to see my mom struggle. But she lived and I thank God for that everyday. I worked with her everyday and now she's lots better.

Mom, I love you and I thank you for everything. I'm glad you're my mom and that you're here with me, no matter what. I thank you and I wouldn't have it any other way.

-Tameka, Santa Clara

From The Beat: You are a fortunate girl, Tameka..... fortunate that your mom survived that terrible episode, and fortunate that 'the system' knew the best place for you, at that difficult time.

Live Life Right

If you do things will glow bright.

Try to live without a fight.

Some people hate their life 'cause they're not white.

Try to be successful, no one is going to bite.

You could be a model don't worry about your height.

Some girls have low self esteem so they rely on the pipe.

It doesn't matter is yours dark or light.

Don't doubt, be prosperous you just might.

Don't feel down you're special you should rise.

Live up to you, don't be in a disguise.

Don't listen to what people say they're full of lies.

When you have a good heart the negative will die.

Winning your self-esteem back is the ultimate prize.

-Daniel, Alameda

From The Beat: Great poem - thanks for sharing with The Beat. What you wrote is inspiring and uplifting which is something we don't see as often here.

The Most Difficult Challenge

Well, I would like to write about this topic tonight because I have a lot on my mind right now. As you guys might already know, I been here for about two years in the max unit. I would just like to say Q-vo to the camaradas up in the halls, and to the once upstate dong hella time.

Well, I'm one of those camaradas that's gonna do a long time 'cause I just found out that tomorrow, Friday the 27th of '09, is when the judge is gonna sentence me to fourteen years in the pinta! Shhh! Really I didn't think I was gonna do that much time.

But ey, what can I say? Life is hard and shhh happens.

I believe this is my most difficult challenge because I'm not gonna be there for my baby boy growing up as a youngster. And that really messes me up 'cause I don't know if my son is gonna grow up hating me or loving me. I'm gonna be true to you guys, that's the only thing that I'm scared of, really. I really don't care what happens to me up in the pen or wherever I go, 'cause nothing hurts more than your own son hating you for not being there for him while growing up.

I know time flies, but it's gonna be a eternity 'til I get o0ut and be with my son and parents. But it's OK 'cause I know that I'm gonna be OK up in the pen porque the homies control most of the prison. And pues, we have a bunch of things to keep our minds busy.

What I really wanna say to the camaradas out there is to be careful who you do hauls with 'cause you never know who might snitch you out. Always trust your self and no one else. Don't take your life for granted, carnales, 'cause I wouldn't like to see you guys wasting your time behind bars up in Pelican Bay or Folsom Prison. I ain't saying to stop gangbanging or anything like that 'cause my ass is never gonna stop putting it down for that big load por vida barrio.

All I'm saying is to be smart and think about what you're gonna do before you do it. I love all the homies, and have respect for all the barrios in San Jose that be putting it down for their barrios. This one is going out for all them camaradas from my barrio and for the rest of them homies out there.

Well Hersheys, you take care of yourself and try to do good and not end up locked up like me 'cause this shhh ain't that nice. I know it's fun putting it down for the color and the barrio we love but there's times when you have to think about your future.

Well, that's it for now. Hope you people get my message and understand what I had to say. Much love and respect.

To the camarada.

-Temper, Santa Clara

From The Beat: First, Temper, can we tell you how sorry we are that you have been sentenced to such a long prison term. You must know how much we admire you for your mind and your skills. Yes, you will be able to get through this dark time ahead because you have the inner resources to do it. But somehow, Temper, you have to be able to put together the two competing loves in your life. And make no mistake about it, they are competing. The reason you have let your son down (even though you didn't want to) is because of gangbanging. You can't serve two masters. To serve one is to sacrificing the other. So we hate that your advice is to stay true to the gang, because all you're doing is setting the next boy up to be that absent father! You are way too smart not to be able to put these pieces together and figure out why your puzzle pieces don't fit. You can choose the gang, of course, but then don't pretend that your son is your first priority. You have a very difficult choice ahead of you. It's a lie to think you can choose both. It is our hope that you would choose your son.

Lookin' for A Way Out

What's good Beat, this young Nuttso lookin' for a way out of this scandalous life feel me? I been doin' too much for seventeen years and now eighteen coming up around the corner and if you don't got a plan then you aint got no point of gettin' out because you just going to end back up in jail or dead that's why I'm lookin' for a way out.

Even if it's going to school, getting a job or even squarin' up for awhile. It's going to save yo life. Plus doing all this bullshhh is getting old. All I want to do is stay free and stay alive and have a couple kids by ma wife, feel me baby I'ma be home soon. But I'm gone Beat and ma way out is going to school, getting a job, and getting off probation.

-Young Nuttso, Alameda

From The Beat: Everything you say makes sense, and we wish you the best. Do whatever it takes to stay free and alive.

Falling Tears From Strong Warriors

Tears falling like rain drops from the strongest warriors
An alliance broke apart then rebuilt with new soldiers
A man may think his arm is tough, but what's an arm to a loaded barrel

Why risk it all when at the last minute you don't have the heart to pull the trigger

Take a man's life, they say it will be on your conscience forever

Follow to be followed but that's not my intentions

A strong man will stand alone no matter what situation

An army of one to me is better than an army of millions
Because you don't have to expect to be deceived by the ones you think you're close to

A wolf runs in packs to be protected by its own breed

Bows down when it needs to hoping one it will take lead

As vicious wolves may seem by themselves it's a different scene

Acceptance is what they want so they migrate to a pack of many welcomed in with open wings

In reality, open your eyes, what do I really mean

It's funny when you stare because that stare don't make you nobody

But an imposter up in a cage where birds always sing

-Crazy L, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Do you really think it takes heart to pull the trigger? We find the absence of heart to be the real culprit! Where does "conscience" come from? What else does the wolf pack offer besides acceptance? What makes these staring "wolves" imposters?

Obstacles: Mission Nirvana

In life, there are many obstacles. Right now I'm trying to get past some of the hardest ones. I have to defeat the temptations of going back to my old ways when I get out of here. I have to find happiness in something positive to get past these obstacles.

I have to also find who I really am and weed through all of these outside influences I am dealing with all the time. I think that is the most important obstacle in life besides life and death its self.

For me, it's a rough and confusing road but I must stick to and hopefully I will eventually reach that state of mind: Heaven on Earth. Pray for me.

-Manbearpig, Solano

From The Beat: We wish you luck with this adventure and success on your mission. It is crucial to understand your self well, and to listen to yourself clearly despite all the noise—we think following that path will help you find what you feel is happiness.

The Smooth Side: Food For Thought

If you really trip, we waste a lot of energy tryna knock each other off when all that's gone happen is (this is not a threat, Beat Within, I'm just emphasizing my point)... Back to the topic, is that you try an' smack one of my thugs, then my goons gone knock yo' mans off. It's a repeated cycle. Plus, when them young dudes get older, they gone start getting' heavy in the game. And it ain't gone stop. Like Jacka said, "War in the streets, ninjas trippin' over old shhh."

Tell you something about other cultures... White people, they know who they are. Look at the Italians. They didn't care about the American flag and al that when they got here. First thing they did was put together the mafia. Then the Irish, they took over city hall and found they ninjas jobs. Same with the Jews. You can't tell me they care about a ninja in the city more than they own relatives or kind. Shhh....

It' about blood lookin' after yo' own. Black people the only ones stupid enough to worry about their enemies. Maybe once you strip away the rationalizations, it always comes down to a simple matter of escape — escape from poverty or boredom or crime or the shackles of your skin. Maybe by going to school, I'd be repeating a pattern that had been set in motion centuries before, the moment white men themselves, or by their own fear of inconsequence, had landed on Africa's shores, bringing with them guns and blind hunger to drag away the conquered in chains. That first encounter had redrawn the map of Black life.

I'm tellin' you, man, the world is a strange place. Let me give you an example. Say you waitin' on somebody on the 20th floor of a buildin', right? And they late, so you just lookin' off the rail, like, "Whew! This kinda far. Let me bag back." When all of a sudden a body flies past you. A suicide... Well, you're not sure, so you take a look over the rail, and sure enough, the body's lying there, all twisted and broke. People start screamin', covering their eyes. And the strange thing after people get through screamin', they go for a second look, then scream again. Like, what do they expect the second time around? That's some morbid shhh... But like I said, the world is strange like that.

But anyway, clean-up crew comes. Nothin' special, a mop and a broom. I mean, makes sense, right? Don't need no special equipment or suit. Mopped up a life in less than five minutes. Then, yeah, you think, "Damn! What does the janitor think at the dinner gable that night?" Bingo. Who was it that jumped? A young white girl, 16 or 17, one of those punk-rock types with blue hair and a ring through her nose. Finally, you wonder what was she thinkin' while riding up the elevator. Shhh....

People had to be standin' right by her on the way up. Maybe they looked at her, decided she was a freak, ten went back to thinkin' 'bout their promotion, that raise, while the whole time the girl standin' right by 'em stressin' in pain. I guess gotta be a lot of pain, 'cause you figure right before she jumps, she looks down and knows that shhh gone hurt

-E-Boy, San Francisco

From The Beat: This is a very thoughtful piece. We particularly like the example of the punk rocker who rides up the elevator with suicide on her mind, but everyone is too concerned with their own lives to pay any attention. How does this apply to your life? At the same time, when we read, "The Italians, they..." or "The Irish, they..." or "The Jews, they..." or "Black people the only ones who..." we always know that what follows is a generalization, and does not apply to every individual in that group. So, how do we become people who see the individual standing next to us in the elevator, and not the "group" they come from?

Not The Man I Used To Be

Beat, I'm still in this max unit waiting to see how my life will turn out to be. No phone calls or letters from those so-called loved ones, only from my lady right next door to me. I wonder, do the homeboys really care? Or maybe I'm to be the one saying they forgot about me. And is my family going to turn their backs without supporting me?

One thing they don't know is I'm not the man I used to be. Actions speak louder than words, so I'm ready to prove how this homeboy is going to be. I'ma live the life that's best for me. I got little sisters that grew up without me. It's a shame to know they hardly now who I am, just about my jail living. I love them to the fullest, so I'm going to ask them to forgive me.

Also, I got a mom who tries to hold me up through my stay here. She's doing her best for me. Plus, my lady is showing me some love every now and then.

I got very few loved ones who care for this vato that's in his new habitat. I guess I been that wolf living in sheep's clothing. I came to the realization on a lot about life, plus, about who I am, what I want, and that life that's ahead of me.

Well, Precious, I love you. Plus, to the family, I love you no matter what. also Eagle. Love you, primo. Stay up. One love, one life one struggle. Gone love you Baby Precious.

-Peanutt, Santa Clara

From The Beat: We're don't know if we would even recognize the man you used to be because we admire so much the man that you have become. If you have only a few loved ones who care for you, that's their loss, because you are very much worth caring for. Yes, it is a shame that your little sisters only know you through your incarceration, but you can make all that up to them by knowing what you want to accomplish with your life, and then proceeding to do it.

Longing

Shhhh, I'm missin' my home and my family. But who doesn't? I want to go home and lay down on my bed and tell my family that I love them. When I get out, my lil' brother is goin' to be 25 years old and my youngest brother is goin' to be 21 years old! I'ma be 27 or 28. That shhhh's long! This shhhh ain't worth it.

But I gotta do what I gotta do just to survive when I transition into another system. I have to learn about my surroundings in order to place myself to be invisible to the naked eyed so I could be untouched. That's one thing I don't want to do.

I want to roam free and be visible to people. I don't want to be a ghost to a mirror. I want to see my family. I want to be by their side and tell them that I have a reason to live. I wasn't born to die. I was born to be an angel to my family. Give them an inspiration to live another day. Do what my mom couldn't do. Pursue her dreams and run to the finish line of my goals. Show my family if I can make it, then they can too.

I was the man of the house, but now my lil' brother is. I know they are goin' to succeed. And I have faith in my sisters, too. They have a life to pursue. And for my mom, she made it this far, and she will make it farther than the earth to the stars.

As for now, I'm out. I love my family to death. One love, one life. Stay up. I promise to try my best.

-Toony, Santa Clara

From The Beat: We wish we could take away some of the sadness that fills every line of this tribute to your loving family and to freedom itself. If it's any comfort, we are certain that they already know just how much you love them, and their love will still be there waiting for you when you return to their warm embrace. Yes, it's long, but it's not so long that you will forget how much you love them or they will forget how much they love you.

My most difficult challenge

My most difficult challenge happened four years ago. It started as just another car theft and ended with my best friend shot and killed, another one injured and still on crutches, and me with nothing but a minor head injury.

We were going to steal a Corvette from someone's home. What we did was gathered the tools necessary, walked to the house and my best friend, Vicious, who always does the locks wanted to look in the window of the house. I told him, "no" we only came for the car, but he had an annoying way of making me change my mind.

So, I said, "alright let's make it quick and get the hell out of here, you know I hate cops."

We looked in and there went all my common sense. The only description for these people (victims) was they had a lot of money. They had lap tops, PSP's, cell phones, all types of iPods, game systems, and a flat screen TV. The place looked like they robbed Best Buy.

The only thing going through all three of our minds was how to get in that house. We went to each window to see if they would open, and one of them in the back opened. "Alright", I whispered to Vicious, and Shadow "we go in grab as much shhh as possible and bounce."

Vicious asked what about the car, and I said "screw that car, we ain't gon' have no time 'cause these people gon' wake up. We got five minutes if that, so we need to hurry, alright let's go."

I ain't gone lie, I was scared as hell, but I did it anyway. We were in there about three minutes, and I looked around then freaked out. There were bright bandanas everywhere which meant these were rival's to my hood. Then something really bad happened, my homie Vicious ran into a dresser and a stereo fell off and broke. I heard yelling from upstairs, and got my bag and told them, "let's go!"

By the time we reached the window they were walking across the room (with guns) but I didn't notice at first. We got outside and ran. They followed us. They shot Vicious first, clean head shot.

I pulled out my four-five and shot back and I was able to get one in the leg. There were two left. I heard more gun shots and I saw Shadow go down. I turned back and kept shooting not caring whether I lived or died, and saw Shadow was still alive. The two were out of bullets. I heard sirens, but stayed by Shadow. The two came at me, one picked up a bear bottle. I saw him raise the bottle and I tried to move out of the way, but

I was too slow. As the bottle hit the side of my head I saw the police lights and the two took off. I started to feel dizzy, and felt my face. When I felt the blood gushing from the side of my eye I fainted and went into shock.

I woke up what seemed like the next day, but had actually been a week. My real mom, sister, and brother were there and I could tell my mom had been crying. My sister looked pissed, but not at me. I had one of the worst migraines, and then I remembered Shadow and nearly jumped out of the bed.

It surprised me when my sister got up and helped me out of bed despite my mom's protests. My sister just said, "he needs to see him." When I got up I couldn't see out of my right eye, and it was patched up but I could worry about that later I told myself. I was sore all over, so with my sister and brothers help I managed to limp my way to Shadow's room. He laid there with IV in his arm, and he seemed to barely be breathing. I half limped, half stumbled to where he slept. His parents had come earlier, my mom had said. He was shot three times! Yeah, three times! And still he lives. He was shot once in the leg, once in his back barely missing the spinal cord, and once in his foot. As I sat there looking at one of my best homies, and remembering what happened to Vicious. My feelings turned from sad to murderous rage.

I was going to kill them if not me someone will that I knew. My sister looked the same way as if she knew exactly what I was thinking.

I left the hospital 2 days later, my anger only fueled by the death of Vicious and the thought of Shadow's condition. Me and my sister decided we couldn't commit murder because we were not slick enough, so we decided our cousin should do it because he's killed people and never gotten caught. My cousin said of course he'd do it just watch the news. The next morning we turned on the T.V. and sure enough their faces were there and I felt no remorse. The Doctors said I'm lucky I didn't lose an eye because of how close the glass got.

I would give both my eyes and an arm or a leg to have Vicious back. I have never forgiven myself for letting things get that far out of control. I learned a lesson that night, which still gives me nightmares. No matter how much you think you have a situation under control, things change just like the wind changes direction. To those who will listen remember wealth is the root of all evil everyone wants it.

-Rippa, Land Of Enchantment, New Mexico
From The Beat: Wow! This was a powerful story with a lot of detail. Is this the reason your in detention now? Did your other friend recover from his wounds? With the choices you all made, think about all the lives you have changed forever. A change that can never be taking back because of a choice that was made to commit a crime.

Potential

What can I see
 When I'm told there is nothing?
 But why can't it be,
 When I know there is something?
 My mind is my greatest friend... and enemy.
 It'll sprout roots, dig deep and become a tree:
 Wise, wounded and weathered by time,
 That just passes by like a bee.
 And, just like a bee' sting,
 That stops its own wings from beating:
 I simultaneously become the very entity
 That will eventually destroy me...

I am my own greatest enemy... I am

-Steve, San Francisco

From The Beat: There is much insight in the line, "My mind is my greatest friend... and enemy." You are so right. You do carry the seeds of your own destruction within you; but you also carry the seeds of your own greatness, your own accomplishments, your own triumphs. Yes, there is something, and the something is you!

My Most Difficult Challenge

This is my first time in juvenile hall, and I don't like it at all because they tell you what you can do and what time you need to go to bed, and what time you eat. I think that's not cool at all. I like better having my freedom and doing the right choices in my life.

I think about what I want for my future, and what's best for me and my loved ones. I'm read to make a change and do everything I have to do to stay out of trouble. I'ma do this because I love my mom, 'cause every time she comes and sees me, she cries and tells me that she raised me better. It hurts me and I don't want nothing bad to happen to her and take care of her. One thing for sure is that I love my mom. Since I was five, my dad passed away and I really miss him and love him. RIP dad. Love ya.

-Ready To Change, San Francisco

From The Beat: Since you forgot to put your name on this excellent piece, we had to give you a name. Juvenile Hall is designed to make you hate it so that you never come back! You know exactly what led you here, so you also know exactly what you have to not do in order to avoid coming here again. Stay in school and get your diploma, and make our mom very proud of you.

Word To God

Chorus

Dear God, I know whereva you at, you can still hear me
An' no matta how far away you is, you still right here wit' me

An' e'rything I've done wrong I need you to help me fix it, Lord

Help me succeed in life, show me the way, Lord, an' I'll fix it

Verse 1

Well, today's judgment day an' ya boy got court

God called me to church, an' I need yo' support

I've been in these streets a long time, Man, jus' doin' dirt

Got sins on my head fo' leavin' people hurt

All I hear is "Amen" or "Lord Hallelujah!"

An' I apologize, God, that ain't how I'll do ya

I made mistakes, committed sins, an' now I ask

forgiveness

I'll change it all if I could, the Lord as my witness

An' if I should die right now, I want somebody to miss me

Lived with hate fo' so long, I want somebody to kiss me

I'm in a cell right now, feel like ain't nobody with me

Fo'eva loyal to the streets, so they say they miss me

But I know it like I know myself... e'rybody fishy

Not a letta nor a picture, e'rybody dissed me...

(Trivia Track though fo'eva a real ninja. It ain't finished but it's gon hit the radios e'ry Sunday, ya dig. This basically 'bout al the crimes an' time I've done in my past, an' damn near drove myself crazy 'cause shhh wasn't goin' my way on my time...)

-Young Dunny, San Francisco

From The Beat: If you nearly drove yourself crazy living life the old way, you can now drive yourself back to sanity and decency by following the light you now see. We hope you get that kiss you crave. You deserve it. (We wish life was like "Sleeping Beauty" so that you would wake from a deep and dark sleep and step into the light with nothing more than a kiss from the right person...)

Disrespecting Females

Wha's up, Beat? I ain't feeling none of these topics today, so I'm going to talk about the topic, "How ninjas be disrespecting females."

I don't understand why females be so in love with these ninjas, and all they be doing is putting their low self-esteem down. When ninjas be calling females beezies. I don't understand why some females be responding. Shhh, some females really start to believe that's they name, man, and it's really not. It's sad, though, because if it wasn't for us, none of they pissy tail ass ninjas would be here. We made them, they didn't make us.

How I feel? Every time they walk past us, they should be showing us respect instead of putting us down, 'cause, to keep it real, we ain't no "hoes, bitches, sluts, tricks, bops," none of that shhh. Man, I be getting hella mad when I be seeing that happen. Then some ninjas have the nerve to put their hands on females. That shhh be making me hella mad. Us females need to stand up and put these ninjas in check. We own them, they don't own us.

-Queen Bri, San Francisco

From The Beat: We agree that disrespecting females is an epidemic among both the boys and the girls! It starts with teaching at home. Yes, you should demand to be treated with respect, but you must also give respect. You don't own men any more than men own you. Yes, you made the boys, but they also made you. It takes two to tango! (In the play, "Lysistrata," written by Aristophanes more than 2,000 years ago, the women of Greece stop providing sex to their mates to force them to stop making war. Women have power if they organize and use it!)

My Most Difficult Challenge

My most difficult challenge I've ever faced was deciding what to do after my mom died. All I want4ed to do was just sit in my house and smoke until I fell asleep. I did that for about four or five days until I realized that that wasn't what my mom would have wanted me to do.

So I started to go back to school, trying hard to succeed in the classroom which used to be my 'hood before I started banging. I stopped smoking 'dro for about seven months. I came very close to getting a 4.0 GPA on one of my report cards. (I was mad at myself for not taking PE seriously. I knew I coulda gotten an A, but I just didn't feel like dressing for it.)

My life was going good until I moved to the 'hood. It was summertime. I had started smokin' 'dro again, hangin' with some wrong people, and got jumped in. I realized I was headed down a bad path that wasn't going to get me anywhere, so I decided to get out. Long story short, I thought my homies and the gang was going to help me with my mom's death, but I realized I was wrong and got out before it was too late.

-Tony, San Francisco

From The Beat: We don't know what brought you here, but it's very clear that you have insight into your own situation, so you know what you have to do (and not do) to fix the problem. You have far too much going or you to waste it. You don't have to stop "playing," but you do have to apply what you know to your life, and make the necessary sacrifices to get back on that academic track you were doing so well at.

Robbed of My Youth

I was robbed of my youth by the street.

Selling cocaine had an influence on me.

A young ninja with the pistol is what I wanted to be

I got addicted to the street and I turned into a monster.

Busted a ninja's head with the butt of the chopper.

Young go gettter crazy lil' ninja.

Hot-headed, hot-tempered and quick to pull the trigger,

could give a shhh about a ninja or a female

I thought I was in love a couple times but I guess I thought wrong.

It didn't take long for me to face reality.

Statistics said I would fail because of my nationality.

But I blame society for exploring negativity at such a young age

my future I couldn't see.

The ninjas on my block made the shhh look easy.

But little did I know this hit get real greasy and by greasy I meant scandalous.

I don't know if I can handle this in and out jail stuff, it's messing up my mind.

Every time I turn around, I gotta do some more time.

Plus the feds is on my line, they gave my cousin nine

Ran up in the house, took the money, the dope, the pistols and the dro',

make us get down on the flo'.

Before they could ask questions, I told them I didn't know shhh.

I aint snitchin' on my ninjas 'cause ninja that's some bull-shhh.

Never sell out, never go snitch, never trust no one and get money till I'm rich.

That's how I live...yeah that is how I live.

- Narco, Alameda

From The Beat: This poem shows an incredible talent, an incredible gift. But those last lines are wrong! It's not how you live, it's how you die. Everything you describe in this poem is what will kill you. You know how you will live? By harnessing the talent and heart you show into fighting for a better life - the life you deserve. Wake the hell up, or find yourself doing some hard time, 'cause of your immaturity and ridiculous pride.

The SF Pal Seahawks

My football years was very fun. My Mighty Might year was very fun. I was a two-string quarterback, a fullback, a running back, and a wide receiver. That year my Mighty Might football record was 4-8. I had about six touchdowns out of my whole Mighty Might football year.

My junior Peewee year was very good and very fun an' great. I love it. I play quarterback and running back. That year my junior Peewee football record was 5-8. I had about four touchdowns out of my whole junior Peewee football year.

My football Peewee year was the best year ever, because we almost went to Florida, but we lost against the Santa Clara Lions. That year I played quarterback and fullback. That year my Peewee football record was 6-8. I had about three touchdowns out of my whole Peewee football year.

But on August 1, 2009, I'm going to play for the Junior Midgets and I'm going to be a quarterback.

-Kenyatta, San Francisco

From The Beat: It must be very frustrating to have your football "career" interrupted by this temporary time out. We hope you're using the time to see that you need to pursue your goal of playing football, maybe even beyond the Junior Midgets, and that to do that, you have to stay out of places like this and get a good education. Good luck!:

My Dad

The only person that I can remember that was never in my life was my dad. I never got to meet him. I don't feel bad, because I don't need him. And up to this point, I still don't need him.

I've learned to grow up not needing a dad. I'm used to it. Sixteen years without a dad. You kinda don't have a choice but to get used to it. I don't really care. I wouldn't want him anyways. I can and have done everything by myself, without him. So dad, wherever you are, I hope you're happier than I am.

-Erik, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: We don't know the whole story Erik. But we're sorry that, so far, happiness has escaped you. You sound like a very resourceful fellow, and we admire your independence. We're betting that if you ever have the opportunity, you'll be a very good dad.

Saturday Night Nightmare

My worst challenge was when I was out. It was a Saturday night and I was in the hood. My brother had just gotten a new car three week earlier. This particular weekend my brother decide to go to the side shows , have fun and do what youngstes do with a new car - paid for brand new 745 BMW candy paint and all.

Like I said, my brother went to have fun and I was invited. My brother is 24 years old and I was always with him, something like a shadow. That night. I didn't want to go with him because we argued over some females and we wasn't on speaking terms. So two o'clock hit a-m time, the strip was cranking as we would say, that meant it was live, all the clubs let out, so you know it was packed. Anyhow my brother was out there.

He got into some problems and they saw him and shot his car. Swiss cheese style.

He didn't have a chance. My point is I was gonna be with him that night and I wish I could turn back time.

That is my biggest challenge. RIP big bro...

-Meezy, Alameda

From The Beat: First off, we're so sorry for the suffering, you and your family must have gone through, losing your bro, so young to violence. In truth, it's a blessing you weren't with him that fateful night, he would never have wanted his baby brother to go down with him. Stay strong and live on to honor his name.

Overcoming Rape: My Most Difficult Challenge

My most difficult challenge was my rapes. Just when I think I'm getting over them, or at least through the worst of the pain, I notice how they continue to control how I go about life. Those incidents still affect how I act, and keep me from being able to trust anyone. I also deal with emotional and mental issues daily. Hopefully, I meet my full potential and leave everything in the past.

-Raquina, San Francisco

From The Beat: The first investigation of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was conducted on survivors of rape. It is a real condition, and you have described its symptoms. We hope you are talking to professional adults (psychologist? counselor?) who have experience in helping rape survivors to cope, and to get their lives back on track.



Hot Summer Nights

It's a hot summer night in my ride
Nothing but love in my varrio as I roll by
Stop at the park before dark
Pick up the homeboys and hynas, it's time to cruise
Go to the store and get the booze
Cruise down the street, fresh Cortez's on all our feet
It's a Friday night, get downtown and it's a sight
Music bumping, woofers slumpin',
No police, so don't worry about nothing.
Roll a blunt of the green, mixed with alcohol is a beautiful thing.

It's late at night and we see a fight
It's the homeboy so we hop out, by the end
The other guys dead with out a doubt.
Police rolls up just like that, and now we all get the rap murder in the first degree, all I wanted was to party.
A Friday night, perfect then a light, now one thing ruined all our lives.

-Wero, Santa Clara

From The Beat: You're right, how quickly a good time can turn into your worse nightmare. You're young and of course you want to have a good time, but the streets can get you caught up in mess that you don't want to be apart of. We hope that the next time you'll think before you act because partying is not worth your freedom, especially with folks who do not have the same mindset as you to do right.

Hunters Of Illusion

When I read this poem, I thought about the illusions and the bait that young males in the inner city chase and bite at every day.

I also thought about the desperate misfortunes that exist in the community such as poverty, crime, drug addiction and so on, we try to get away from the desperate misfortune by taking the bait and looking for the instant gratification of drug dealing and a life of crime.

The bait we chase could be anything from women, money, cars, jewels, and many other material things. Those things are the illusion they are only temporary and they won't last.

-B-B, Alameda

From The Beat: Thank you for this thoughtful analysis!

Give It All Up

To give up my past and my old ways, what would it take? For me to give it all up, it would have to be for family, I would do a lot for my family.

If giving up my old ways to stay out of jail, so I could be with my family, I would do it in a heartbeat, without a doubt. If giving up my old ways, my bad ways to make my family happy and to be with them, then so be it.

My family is very important to me, I love them with my whole heart. I would stop all my bad habits, anything that will take me away from my family or hurt then in anyway. I will put my best effort toward doing what makes them happy and keeps me out of the criminal justice system.

Remember folks, family first, be smart about what your doing, stay out of jail. Think of your fam bizzle.

Well, I'm gonna pull my pencil off my paper, alrato.

-Flaco, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Thanks for sharing this piece with us! We know that you can do it, as long as you apply yourself. We wish you the best at everything you do and hope that you do well in everything you pursue. Keep us posted!

Just a Moment

Can we please take a moment to mourn?

For Pac, Biggie, and Pun,
'Cause through us they live on,
Jam Master J, Freaky Ty, and Aliyah,
Big L, and Left Eye when we die,
We hope to see ya.

Can we have a moment for children?
Who got raped and murdered or trapped in this system?
Who never knew their fathers,
Never learned to dream.

They were raised by drug dealers, killers, and crack fiends,

For single mothers forced to play mom and dad,
Trying to give their kid stuff they never had,
For my homies in the pen,
Hoping rhymes will get them signed,
So when released they can say good-bye to a life of crime,

For all the mothers holding their sons,
In the street, bleedin'

The sorrow too deep for speakin'
This is just a moment out of our day-to-day struggle,
To show the one we really care about,
We love them

--Reaper, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Wow, what a turn you've taken us in the poem! From the famous stars to the most painful experiences, you've taken us on a tour from heaven back down to earth.

The Devil In Me

Is the devil waiting for me to die

so I can work for him in hell?

Will he take me in my sleep?

I had a horrible dream. In it

I sipped from Satan's sinful soup.

I painted his dinner table with clotted blood.

And then I paused, to look at myself.

I was wearing torn rags.

There was no air.

The devil was holding on to me.

I was in anguish, and the only sound

was a hoarse whisper.

"We came from the door of red", it said.

And then the devil disappeared.

A chill ran down my neck and back.

Before he disappeared behind a cloud of smoke.

A chill ran down my neck and back.

Before he disappeared he made me a promise.

I still remember what he looked like:

a wrinkly, purple man, who looked about four-thousand-years-old.

He walked hunched over, as if shrunk by gravity.

His hands were long and bony, with fingers

like purple sticks of dry ice. He wore no pants,

but a robe that hung to the floor.

His face showed no history of sleep.

His head was large. There were massive craters

on his cheeks that looked like bubbling boils.

He had a stony expression.

His promise: that I would sleep forever.

I looked around and spotted several of my friends,

ready to join me, eternally, in hell.

-Nathan, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: Well wrought poem. Pretty scary. We suggest you stay away from this guy. Warn your friends, too.

Institutionalized

I think it's easier to live life in an institution. The reason I think that is because I'm 18 now, and I've been in and out of juvenile hall since I was a young teen.

I am currently here writing, but I wish I could be in county jail or kicking it with my own. Yes, I'm white, not racist, but white and damn proud to be. I have been to both county jail and another institution. Three months ago, I went to county jail got sentenced and went to Elmwood. From there, I went to the barracks on the farm. My charges were as an adult-- possession and sales of drugs.

Yes, I sold weed and got caught at 18 for a felony. My mind is institutionalized and the life outside, I'm a businessman / drug dealer. All money is green to me.

Skin color means nothing outside these walls but in county jail, or prison, it matters. The hall is chump time. I'm stuck doing the time because of a violation of probation-- it's nothing.

I think I want to go to county because I would be taken care of, minimally, and respected. It sucks to know I'm going nowhere in life, and I'll eventually end up in prison like my cousin. I've accepted my life and I am fine with this life. It sucks to know, but business can still be mine in county and prison. Money is green from all hands!

-Young Wood, Santa Clara

From The Beat: It sounds like you have resigned yourself to live with two things, making money from selling drugs and doing hard time. Our question is, why? You are very young and have so many years to experience the spontaneity of life...doesn't that sound better than money and prison?

Guns Are No Joke

Guns aren't no joke. They do cause a lot of damage and hurt, pain, and even struggles of many different ways. I would love to tell you about when I first seen a gun or when I even so as touched one but those are things that can't be talked about, let alone write about it.

When I think of a gun I think of gangs and people losing lives or even saving lives, it all depends on how you intend to use a gun.

It can be in our communities because it has helped positive citizens when a burglar was in their house or their family is in danger or close to facing death and the gun he's packing can save them, or even help them from getting robbed.

I personally wouldn't want my child to carry a gun because I wouldn't want him to commit murder and end up in this place or in the system or do anything stupid with one. I would never let him hold, carry, pack, or anything like that.

There's a good chance that gun violence will lower and get better 'cause of the thousand plus cops that are always on duty here, but in a way it can also get worse 'cause no matter what, people are still dying from gun battles and gangs are getting bigger everyday and at the same time worse.

That's all I have for The Beat, so stay up through the thick and thin.

-Drifter, Santa Clara

From The Beat: This is a really great piece. Why do you think it's a popular thing among kids to pack a gun now? What would be your suggestion to help end gun violence?

Sitting In My Bedroom

Sitting in my bedroom late last night.... I was watching a movie in my bed, eating a big delicious pizza all to myself with an ice cold two-liter of Pepsi.

I was relaxing in my basketball shorts, white T, and a nice soft pillow resting on the back of my head, the window was open, letting in the cool winter breeze, I had my clean, thick, forty-niner-blanket to keep me warm.

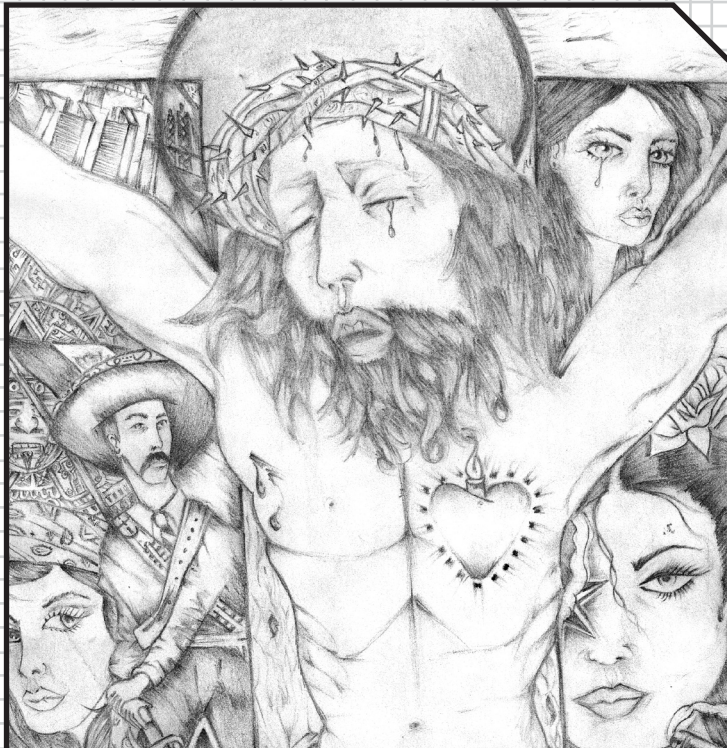
I finished my pizza and soda and started satisfying my taste buds with a new bag of Oreos along with a glass of milk.

There I was, me and my family watching a movie together, spending quality family time, I never felt better in my whole life, right then I thought nothing could go wrong.

I woke up. I woke up to a single cell with a thin, stiff mattress, brick walls, and a smelly toilet, when I get out I'm going to make that dream a reality.

-Flaco, Santa Clara

From The Beat: What a vivid dream, Flaco. What will you do to turn this dream into a reality?



Sacrifice my Friends

I think what I'm going to have to sacrifice for my future is my friends. My friends are what keep getting me in trouble. Whenever I'm with my friends I always end up doing stupid shhh that makes me end up back in here.

The only way I see myself succeeding in life is if I give up the friends I have and make new friends that have a positive influence on me and not a negative one.

The friends I have are no good friends to me but the things we do together aren't good.

My uncle always tells me there are no friends in life because when you locked up you never get letters or anything from them. They don't give a shhh when you're in here, only your family. You might think you have good friends but they can care less what happens to you

Well Beat, I'm out.

-Scott, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Your uncle was right. Who visits you when you're down and who writes you letters to get you through the day? Your family does. There are people out there who can be good friends, but in the end your family will always be there.

A New day, A New Chapter

A new day, a new chapter.

Moving on with joy and laughter.

Clouds have parted, new rays shine.

Life goes on, as well will mine.

Ready to face my problems head on -

no fears or resentments, admitting my wrongs.

I'm going to rehab. I'm going to change.

For sobriety and honesty, a life less deranged.

I know I can do it. The time has come.

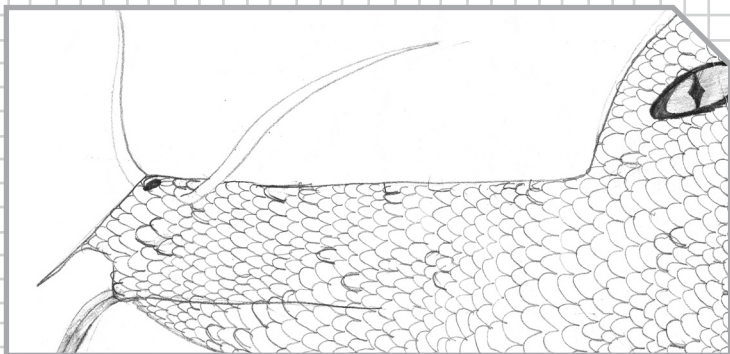
Enough craziness, partying, enough endless fun.

So here's my goodbye to the great Beat Within.

All I ask for is hope and faith that I'll win.

-Duni, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: Thanks for the salute. We're very happy for you. And keep writing. Write to us at our website. We love success stories.



Challenges: We Barely Talk Anymore

Being in the hall is a challenge for me but my biggest challenge was when I got my girlfriend pregnant.

About two years ago my girlfriend went to Florida a week later she called me and told me she was a month pregnant and when I heard it I went and got drunk and I stayed drunk for a week straight.

I didn't know how I was gonna take care of it. I didn't know where we were gonna live. I didn't know how to tell my parents. So when she came back from Florida we both told my parents and told her parents. For two months we were confused on what to do and how we would support it. Then one day out of the blue she told me that she had terminated it and I didn't agree on it and eventually we broke up and we barely talk anymore.

It was one of the most challenging things to happen to me and I don't think I would have survived it.

-Ace, Solano

From The Beat: We hear how difficult this situation was, and the pain it still causes you. Even older people find parenting a challenge, however usually they aren't also having to figure out everything else at the same time, like where to live and how to support yourselves. You are surviving, we wonder what helps you deal with this?

Hunters Of Illusion

We live chasing dreams
 And impossible things
 Which leads us to sins
 First destroying our wings
 Our hearts never cleans
 Which to loneliness leads
 Where depression lives
 A life where we never win
 Where no one cares how you been
 And life has no meaning
 Where illusion an dreams
 Make us feel like kings
 But never come reality where illusions are dreams

-Lavelle, San Francisco

From The Beat: Are all the dreams we chase nothing but illusions, or are there dreams which we can really see come true in our lives? The American poet/writer Edgar Allen Poe once asked in a poem: "Is all that we see or seem but a dream within a dream?"

A Lie I Will Never Forget!

One day I came home high and I was coming from a party and my mom asked me do I smoke and I said no, it was hard lying to my mom but I didn't want to get in trouble.

I never thought I'll do that to my mom, then I started to do it often to where I didn't care. Then my dad asked me, and I never lie to pops, so I told him I smoke and he understood that, then I thought I was OK but I realize I wasn't—so I constantly got high and I see its not a problem.

But what I ask myself does it hurt my family, or my future, maybe, but then they say you wont make it no where in life, but I see famous people that smoke weed so I see it's not harming their life. But anyway I regret lying to my moms I feel that I don't love her enough to tell her the truth, and I don't want her to distrust me to where she don't love me no more. But that's one lie I won't ever forget.

-Ray, Solano

From The Beat: We see you have given a lot of thought to whether smoking is bad for you. It sounds like it was bad for your relationship with your mother—you lied to her when you never wanted to do that. You don't know that weed doesn't cause problems for famous people—you assume it doesn't, but you don't know. We don't know anyone whose life has been helped by smoking.

Is There An Answer

We only know what we see and what we told
 but the system got me trapped I'm just another ninja sold.
 They the reason why money is so important to us
 I'm anotha statistic they want me to crumble like crust.
 But why am I the magic eye and all my life
 I been tryin' not to die, my whole life has been a lie.
 I can't be free, no not me, because I see
 why I be, a stranger in my own eye
 and still I try not to cry but they tryna wash me dry.
 With my complexion they handle my direction
 many ways of my time how can I see if I'm so blind
 Whys shed tears, I'm not in fear
 I'm black but why does that make me an object to
 attack?

and on my back I'm like a beetle waiting to be flipped over
 I'm so confused, I can't be used, but I feel drunk when
 I'm sober.

A lie is easier to tell than the truth
 and it's harder to rhyme when you're in a booth.
 But why give me teeth
 if they won't let me eat knowledge?

I ask why
 why do I ask why
 is that a problem
 Am I asking too many questions?

-Tae Dump, Alameda

From The Beat: Why have a good mind if you don't question things? Maybe you do know more than you see and are told, with your "magic eye." Reject the limitations others would put on you, eject them from your mind. It is often easier to lie than tell the truth, so why is truth so important to us and our lives, and our connection to others—and spirit?

The Dumbest Thing I Ever Did

The dumbest thing I ever did was to mess with guys that have no future or interest in my personality.

As my thought my dreams and ma plans in life all I ever wanted was someone other than my family and friends to truly care about me, but it looks like I need to be thankful for what love I do got and focus on that because all in all that's all I have.

-Ladi, Alameda

From The Beat: Having the love of family and friends is not something to settle for. It's a rare thing that anyone who has should be thankful for! There are some people out there who don't feel that anyone loves them, so consider yourself very lucky.

The Dumbest Thing I Did With My Life

The dumbest thing I ever did was keep my life on the path it was on. Five years ago, from a semi-young age, I started getting into trouble — drinking, smoking and taking downer pills. I always wanted to get messed up.

I never paid attention to what I was doing with myself and my family. Stealing stupid shhh that no one reading this would know what to do with. And ever since that semi-young age, I've been getting locked up or arrested. And once I got locked up, I said that I would change. Then I got out and did the same shhh. And that's how it's always been.

But I hope to fix that this time, 'cause that's the dumbest thing I ever did.

-M., Santa Clara

From The Beat: You have a very clear insight into how you got here and how your pattern has not been working for you. But one thing we've learned is that knowledge is not enough to change behavior. That has to come from somewhere deep inside. Since you've said before that you wouldn't mess up again only to mess up again, only time will tell if this time you truly mean it. We believe you do, and we're behind you all the way. But the truth is, your future is in your hands and your choices.

Denial is a State of Mind

...that some of us just cannot escape! We deny our friends, family, even our own problems. But lets stop and think about this for a minute... have you ever wondered why? Did it ever cross your mind, that maybe yeah denial might be the easiest way, but maybe at the same time you could be hurting the people around you more than you are hurting yourself?

After I realized that I was hurting the people around me more than I was hurting myself I didn't want to accept that, because now all I feel is guilt. But in order for me to not feel this way anymore is I have to accept my problem and work on it, and not push the people that love me and are trying to help away, and allow all the help I can get, so I can learn not to deny my problems, cause its a lot easier just to accept it!

-Lil' Skittles, Solano

From The Beat: None of it sounds easy really, the denial or the acceptance. However at least when you accept what is true you can begin to work on it, and sooner than you might even believe, make some great progress.

The Dumbest Thing I Ever Did

Wha's up with The Beat? This ya boy Twaney Mac still up in this thang. The dumbest thing I ever did is getting into the beef. I say this is the dumbest thing I ever did because I want to be able to go wherever I want to when I want. Being in the beef, I can barely go places.

If I could go back into time, I would want to change the path I chose. I would still be playing hoops instead of picking up guns and using 'em.

-Twaney, San Francisco

From The Beat: You don't have to go back into time to change the path you're on. All you have to do is put down the guns, stop doing the things that lead you to this semi-slavery, and go back to school. Pick up a book and a basketball, and leave the rest to fools who want to spend time behind walls!

Knowing Me...

When I turn eighteen I'm going to Santa Rita for six to eight months, but knowing me I'm gone get out in six months for good behavior and be back home with my two boys and family.

I miss my mama, my Dad, my girlfriend aka my wifey, and my sons and my big brothers. I miss them hecka much and I regret even committing a crime to go to jail. When I get out in 2010 with my 2nd chance I'm going to college.

-Freeway, Alameda

From The Beat: We put your pieces together. Stay positive!

My Most Difficult Challenge

My most difficult challenge is not being net to my son, looking at him grow and buying stuff. I hella miss my son, and I'm mad at myself for not being there for him when he really needs me.

But when I get out, I'm going to be the best father that I can be. My son is going to come first. I'm going to try to not do anything stupid for that I can be a real dad to my son.

-Demonio, Santa Clara

From The Beat: We admire you for not blaming anyone else for your situation, and for knowing that the most important priority in your life now is to be a good father. Trying not to do anything stupid is not good enough. You have to KNOW that you won't do anything stupid, even when you're tempted to, because you are responsible for a life. We'd love to read a piece from you describing what it means to be "a real dad to your son."

What If

What if this was all a dream?
What if life ain't what it seems?
What if I wouldn't have met him that day?
What if I had never ran away?
What if I wouldn't have walked that blade?
What if I found a better way to get paid?
What if I wouldn't have dropped out of school?
What if I wouldn't have used my body as a tool?
What if he wouldn't have violated me?
What if I could only be me?
What if I wouldn't have taken what wasn't mine?
What if I can't forget my pointless crimes?
What if he didn't love me as he says?
I am so tired of these what ifs,
Running through my head.

-Monique, Fresno

From The Beat: You are not alone, those what ifs don't go away for most of us either. Since none of us can change the past though, you need to move on with the future and remember what you have learned so you don't make more what ifs for yourself.

Suburb Wangsters

What's up with all these suburb wangsters tryin' to be gangsters, having great lives and having nice houses in nice neighborhoods?

They can't hang with the real hoods. Any real gangster would give up the hood life to have what the suburb wangsters have, like being with their families, having a mom and dad... Most real gangsters don't have both their parents alive. In the ghetto a homie is always dying, and we retaliate, and then police are always messin' with us, trying to pin murders, shootings, robberies, anything to lock a homie or a ninja up.

-Lonely, Alameda

From The Beat: You show real smarts and insights.. But that you could have that good life if you are willing to work for it, meaning even if you live in the hood, does that mean you HAVE to live a hood life? You can choose to try something different, can't you?

I'm Still Living, And So Are You

Imagine that you are in someone else's shoes
Of a man who's confused
Lived by no rules
And for most of his life his only option was to lose
Imagine that you wasn't born with a stack
But just the facts of lost love, yes, love you lack
And every step you take, it was as if you were walking back
Back where you came from
I ain't gotta tell you dawg that be the same song
You taken it day by day, but you screwed in the long run

Now, I don't care if I'm broke or in prison
I ain't in a casket, dawg, that means I am still living

This for anybody that think they got life bad: You still got life!

Now, I ain't no "by the book" ninja
I ain't no "I'ma change my life" ninja
I'm a real ninja, so take it or leave it

-Pinky An' The Brain, San Francisco

From The Beat: We admire your appreciation for being alive because if you value life itself, it means you may not do some of the things you did in the past that put your life at risk. But tell us, why can't a "I'ma change my life" ninja, or a "by the book ninja" be real? It seems to us that if you bring about some of the changes you know you should, you'll be just as real as you are now or you were yesterday. Are we wrong?

Difficulties

My most difficult problem I ever had was when I found out my mom and baby sister had AIDS. I didn't know what to do or hat to say. Another one was when my dad left me for, like seven years, and I stopped caring about a lot of things

My mom is still living for 18 years. When I went to see how she was doing, it's real bad. The look I seen I wanted to kill the irresponsible mutha that gave it to her and passed it to my baby sister. What I did to get through it was get into more trouble — use drugs and alcohol. I had thought of using cocaine, but my family said they would kill me, so now what I do to get through my problems is spend time with my girl and the people that love me.

-Leonard, San Francisco

From The Beat: It must be heavy burden to carry around to know that some man had such little respect for you mom that he gave her this disease which she then passed to your sister. This is one reason why The Beat always encourages condom use, not just to protect against unwanted pregnancies but also to protect against all manner of STDs, including AIDS. As for using alcohol and drugs to get through, their effects are temporary, and then you come down and have to face the same problems you were trying to escape. We're glad you never got into cocaine, but we hope you rethink your alcohol use, because we see how many problems it leads to.

Nobody Helps Me Get Through Nothing

Being in the halls is my worst challenge that I have ever faced, for the simple fact that I can't do the time. Being locked down is not for me. I am tryna see what comes next, but it seems like the end. I been through everything. Nobody helps me get through nothing. I'm in this shhh by myself. For everybody who don't got money, keep ya heads up and stay stunning.

-Lucy, San Francisco

From The Beat: We don't know anyone who likes being locked down, but this is not the end. This is a just a stop along the way, a wake-up call to tell you that whatever you are doing isn't working for you, and to give you some time to think of what you need to do to avoid coming here again. Can you write a longer piece about why nobody helps you, why you feel you're all alone?

"Change... Change"

Instead of being a ward of the court, I'm a ward of my mind

Because I keep having dreams about that baby nine,
So I try to erase the image try to make it go blind,
But it just seems like I'm wasting my time.
So I think thoughts, and try to erase the past
But no matter how hard I try to make it keeps catching up wit' my ass,

Excuse my language, but you have to understand.
I have to release the past to become a young man.
You know how they say this is just a phase, you will get over it
But sometimes I feel like I'm just reloaded,
Ready for traction and ready for distraction,
And ready to pick up that gun and start the bullet action
What kind of gun? We ain't going to get into that
but when I touch that thing, I ain't gonna know how to act.

But I want to change and I want to see my family.
I don't want to see a coffin fit for a 5 foot 8 frame.
So when you mention change, you ain't said nothing but a thing,
And now when I dream negative, it gonna be in vain....

-Meezy, Alameda

From The Beat: Positive dreams, harder than it seems, pickin' sides in a gunfight like kids choosing ball teams, so now you say you want to shift, treat your future like a gift, grateful for livin', sins forgiven, just stay eyes on the prize, focused and driven.

An Illusion

If you really look into what people do, what they say — basically their actions — it's amazing. All in all, everything can be manipulated into anything they please. You can never really know what another person is thinking. In reality, they can begin to have a master plan to thwart your fame and your reputation.

Any person can put on an act is what I'm trying to say. You can be their friend one minute, then the enemy the next. Like in that movie, "The Illusionist." He manipulated everyone. He got everyone. He got everyone to believe that his female was dead, and in the end they ran away together.

It just takes patience and soon enough you will have that person's trust, loyalty, honor and respect, and you can use them for your own good. Life is all about illusions, so to all the people, look outside the box. Don't trust no one. Any person can turn on you. Just be on your toes. Manipulation and illusion are the main things foo's use in prison and society to get over on people. Make sure it doesn't get over on you.

Well, to all the homeboys, stay up and keep your manos (hands) up for the haters.

-Chango, Santa Clara

From The Beat: But Chango, just because people can manipulate, does that mean that all people do manipulate? Aren't there any honest people in the world who could, but don't, try to get over on anyone? Don't you think people follow what they see and act according to the way others act around them? Can you imagine a group of people who remain honest with each other, and therefore those they influence also remain honest with each other? Is this "quality" of lying and manipulating part of the human condition or is it something we learn along the way? Who have you manipulated? Who has manipulated you?

You're Making The Choices

My most difficult challenge has yet to come, but I'm thinking about my life. I haven't had the best life, but not the worst. I'm at that age when I think back on all the stupid shhh I did, and it wasn't worth it. So I want to tell everyone out there that y'all need to realize that everything that happens to you is your fault, 'cause you're choosing to make the decisions.

-Dimples, San Francisco

From The Beat: We can't quite agree that everything that happens to you is your fault (you don't get to choose your parents, for example, or where you live), but we get your point. Thinking about the mistakes you've made means you're leaving childhood behind and becoming a responsible young woman.

This Is It

The dumbest thing I ever did was run away from my problems. I never thought that I would end up thinking about what I really want in life and the choices I make. I don't want my father to look at me like I'm just a waste when he sees me in court. I know that all or some of my choices is not good. I know that it can be a limit... and what I do on the streets has to stop.

I just want to tell the world, my family, and especially God, that this is it. This is where I take that fat-ass turn around about my life. I'm gone be the person I really I wanted to be from the beginning.

The dumbest thing I ever did was lie to my father and run away from my problems, but not no more. I'm going to solve them.

-Meko, San Francisco

From The Beat: If it took this experience to force you to turn and face your problems like a responsible young woman, then it was worth it! Of course, making promises in here is easier than keeping them out there, so tell us what you plan to do (and not to do) that's different, and that will result in different consequences.

Time To Help Myself

My most difficult challenge is me trying to stay true to myself — worry about myself, care for myself instead of others. I tend to do for others more than I do for myself, and, in a way, I feel that's what got me in here.

In words, it's easy to overcome. But in action it is not. I'm not the type of person to say no or degrade someone, leave someone behind. But me helping others was proven to be detrimental to my liberty.

-Dow Jones, San Francisco

From The Beat: Well, of course it depends on what kind of help your friends are asking you for, and what kind of help you're willing to provide. We think that caring for yourself is a very good strategy, but we also hope that you don't stop helping others. Just don't "help" them do something illegal...

Most Difficult Challenge

Hey Beat. My most difficult challenge was taking care of my two little sisters at the age of six years old. It has been crazy.

One of my sisters was mentally ill and on the streets doing drugs. My older sister sold my other sister and me on the streets at the age of eight years old. It was hard trying to help my sister out.

I taught my little sister how to brush her teeth, and how to take a bath. It was hard back then to take care of my sister, and getting raped. It was hard sleeping in cars, parks, and vacant lots.

I was even traded to my mom's friends for her drugs too. I know there are people out there though that have been through worse things than me, but still it was the most difficult time of my life.

-Samantha, Fresno

From The Beat: You have been through some difficult stuff in your life, we appreciate your openness about your story. The best advice we can offer you is to embrace the fact that you are not in those situations anymore and always try to make tomorrow better than yesterday with your beautiful optimism.

The Dumbest Thing I Ever Did

What's up Beat? It's the homeboy Cash here in the max.

Well, let me see, the dumbest thing I ever did was turn my back on my family. The day I turned on my family was the day I felt stupid, useless and cold-hearted. Well, let me tell you what happened.

It was a normal day. My friends asked me to go drink with them and do stupid shhh. I was in my first year as a teen. I went. I didn't come home until 2:00 a.m. My poor family was all waiting for me to come home, worried that something bad has happened.

Me, like an idiot, came home all drunk. I started arguing with my family. At that point, I just didn't care about them. All I wanted was to have fun, go out and drink and do stupid stuff. My family was just telling me they didn't want nothing bad to happen to me.

It took a while for me to realize my family was right and I was wrong. There were more times I done stuff like that, but I learned that that was the stupidest thing I've done.

-Cash, Santa Clara

From The Beat: When you tell us that on a "normal day," you got drunk with your friends when you were not much older than 12, then acting like a spoiled child with your family is the predictable result. In other words, we think it's your drinking that led you to do stupid things. It's a lesson we wish every youngster would get into their heads: getting drunk is stupid; it wipes out your ability to reason, and it has long-term health consequences, especially when you're body and brain are still developing. We appreciate that you feel guilty for treating your family the way you did, but the bigger lesson for our readers is that getting drunk leads to stupid behavior.

Tears Of A Clown

They say a clown is too happy to cry
Nothing can faze him or steal his smile
He walks around, his head held high
But deep inside his burdens continue to pile
In his presence he brings you laughter
You point, then laugh, then ridicule him after
A clown, too modest to make his stand
The entertained too proud to lend a hand
He loves to make you laugh
But prays one day they might care
Hides with a grin his shadowed past
These are the tears of a clown

-Cisco, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Are you the shadowed clown in this tight poem? If so, what are you doing to lessen those burdens piling up inside? They say that laughter is the best medicine. Is it working to cure what ails you?

I Am The Reflection

Trying to see past the looking glass. Incarcerated physically, but mentally I'm free
Free from the world, but reality is reality, so I'm searching for a way to be physically free.
Born a beast, one that has never been tamed
Seen al kinds of bloody scenes, painted, but none that should be framed
I'm alone in this world, so I'm a lone warrior waiting for the day I will be whole again
I only know one thing, and that is a reflection
It is the only thing that hasn't broken the shards of the mirror I look into
I am the reflection, the reflection is me
I am alone in the world, as you can plainly see

-Jay Jay, San Francisco

From The Beat: How can your mental freedom help to keep you physically free? Are you truly alone in the world, or are there people along the way that you can rely on, that care for you? What is the reflection you see in those shards?

Denial

I don't use drugs and alcohol
I don't stay on the streets all night
I don't get mad
I don't lie
I don't break the law
But that's all a lie
I'm in denial
I abuse the drugs and alcohol
I do stay on the streets
Because that's my life
I don't get mad
I get hatred
Pumping through my veins
I do break the law
But it's not my intention
It's just my life
But I intend to change it
And that's not a lie
My days are over
But at the same time
Just beginning

-Chepe, Fresno

From The Beat: Thank you for having the courage to face up to the lies you have told yourself. When you write that you do these things because "it's just my life," you should also factor in jail time, because that is also part of the life you described. So we really want to encourage you to keep the promise you make at the end of this tight poem, because if you don't, you'll be back behind walls writing more tight poems...

Change Ain't Bad

Wha's up lil' dawg? This ya boy Twaney Mac. Man, I really been thinking, and well, I'm ready to change my life and fulfill my dream as a professional basketball star. I'm ready to leave the streets alone. My mom always told me to stay out the streets, but I never listened, and look where it got me... in a cell!

I'm ready to get my life together and move on.

-Twaney Mac, San Francisco

From The Beat: We hope you show this to your mom, because it will make her very happy. She will see that you are turning a corner from childhood into adulthood, and that you're beginning to think like the responsible young man she raised.

Thoughts on Obama

Do you think that Obama really can make changes? Why do people like him? Because he's black or because he's got knowledge? Because he's the first black president, how do we know that he is going to make changes? What if he doesn't do those changes? How many presidents say they're going to make changes and nothing happens? Straight up.

-Truthteller, Alameda

From The Beat: You ask some provocative questions here, and yes no matter what else Obama is, he is also a politician, and we shouldn't make him out to be a saint, or all-powerful.

Emotions Speak

Despair said that nothing was right in this world.
Depression said that nothing would ever get better.
Anger said that the world I screwed.
Anger cured a world that would kill a man in cold blood.
Confusion said nothing made sense.
Heartbreak said something sweet and good was gone and would never be back.
Fear said that happened to him could happen to me... would happen to me.

-Pinky An' The Brain, San Francisco

From The Beat: We love the way you made these emotions into characters that have something to say. But we miss a few you didn't address, like love and hope.

The Streets

I'm steppin' over dead bodies
Homies bargin' to the core
Females selling their bodies like that's all they are made for
Welfare lines just to feed our seeds,
I'm so sick of the greed,
I run the streets at night,
All I see is hunger, fear and pain,
But, I'm staying strong,
With my head held high,
Though I'm barely hanging on,
On my block another one got shot,
Another kid without his daddy,
But, the game won't stop

-Reaper, Santa Clara

From The Beat: This is a stark poem and you've helped to remind us that yes, the game probably won't stop anytime soon. But, we would like to ask, how does one get out of the game? What are some of the examples you've seen?

Easier in or out?

Being out is being free,
But a little less than you can be.
Depending on how much you put out is the amount you conceive.
Working hard to get your check, or making bundles in the street.
Would you rather lie down on your stomach or stand tall on your feet?
But, either one can lead, to getting popped like a pill,
Anything can happen when your neighborhood is a battlefield.
Because every good album will have a bad song
Feeling good doing right but yet it still goes wrong
So, which one is easier, I say they are both the same.
Because whether you "in" or "out" you still suffer with pain.

--JonJon, Santa Clara

From The Beat: That's it. Your piece grabs our attention and you are pointing out to us that it is the individual pain, the suffering that is at the heart of the problem. That's where the solution has to start or the healing must begin.

Denial

It wasn't only once I came home drunk, I have gone home drunk numerous times but my first time was the worst.

I believe it was 2007 and I was a young teen. It was Cinco De Mayo and I got wasted and I walked home stumbling and smelling like drink but when I came home my mom and dad asked me, "Anthony, are you drunk?"

I denied it even though I knew they knew. I said I wasn't drunk.

My dad said that I had one more chance to tell him the truth, and that in the morning that he was gonna ask me only one more time. I woke up about 4:30 in the morning and went to my parents room and told them I was drinking. I didn't get in trouble- my dad was proud I told the truth after denying it.

-Ant Dog, Alameda

From The Beat: After this incident, was it easier for you to t



Somebody Love You

I wish I could hug every ninja
Who lost the trial and go visit
The one who ain't had a trial in a while
And all the gloom of hope
I could help 'em out to show my ninjas
I love 'em I'd walk a hundred-miles
God bless the twelve-year-old who is trying to have sex now
She's got her whole life ahead of her
Help her slow it down
I know what it seem like when nobody care
When you going through your problem, seem like nobody there
I been through so much shhh
In the past year, sometime I turn off the light in the room
And sit there and stare
And start questioning if God really care
I pray every day, but it seem like He don't hear
I just hope God is really there
All I wanna say
Is somebody loves you.

-Lil' Charlie

From The Beat: This is a solid poem that really shows a very mature side of you. You talk about various issues in the poem and express your emotions very clear.

I'm Back

What's up Beat? Ya boy is back again. I just want to say if you are a young teen like me don't have a baby. Wait and wrap it up, 'cause when you got a kid at such a young age, it's no more "I'm-about-to-buy-me-this" or "I'm-about-to-get-that." It's more like, "I'm about to buy My KID this."

Just think about that, and wait to have a kid. I'm not sayin' stop having sex, but if you do wrap it up right there. Get back at me.

-Lil' Charlie

From The Beat: This is some good advice, especially for the ones that are sexually active because not only do you give them some reasonable advice, you give them reasons why. For someone who is sexually active and is listening to some of your advice, they might actually take it, because they see you tell it how it really is.

Getting Angry

The dumbest thing I ever did was instead of taking space and calming down I got angry, screamed, argued and threw stuff.

I should have just took no as no and left alone. But I didn't, I got angry destroyed and made something negative out of the situation.

-Michael

From The Beat: You've learned from your mistake though, it seems like. Have there been times when you DID walk away and take the space you needed?

Denial

One time I was at my potna Darren house and we smoked a few blunts. Then I went home loaded and my mom asked me if was I high. I said no. She was yelling and asking me questions.

I was lying and in denial. She didn't believe me because I was steady in denial. I had a lot of those days but I was still in denial but now I learned how to confess to my wrong doings. I now learned to overcome denial and how to learn to fess up to my wrong doings.

-Michael

From The Beat: This is an excellent piece explaining your situation and turning it into a learning experience. We're glad you learned and 'fessing up to your wrongdoing shows us that you're growing up.

Rest In Peace

Rest in peace to Davon and D-scrilla
My Daddy and Grandpa, man, I really took a loss
Rest in peace to Weezy, J.J. and Greedy
We still in it for you even though you in the sky
Rest in peace to Bill, Jerell and Lil' D
They all were my people, but now they rest in peace
Rest in peace to Baby James even though our click's funk'n'
But that was after you passed, but you already knowin'
Rest in peace to Nay-Nay, Baby Jik-Nik, and my two aunts
And rest in peace To Tank, Khadalfi and Coke Smoke
Rest in Peace to R-Bone even though he was snitchin'
But before he made that mistake he still was project livin'
And rest in peace to my grandma, for real, no lie
And I hope all my dead are happy livin' in the sky
Rest In Peace
My last words go to Weezy and D-Scrilla.
I hope y'all happy in the sky
'Cause y'all still my Ninjas!

- Alley Bo

From The Beat: This is a good heart felt piece dedicated to all your peoples that have passed away. We can definitely feel your pain. Thanks for sharing it with us. Keep expressing any feelings that you feel you need to get off your chest. It's too bad your loyalty runs so deep, given the hood is the problem as to why many of your young peeps are RIP. Be smart!!

I Hope

I don't know if heaven willing to accept me
I got too many sins
I hope God don't overlook me
I hope he understands
That's how I feel right now.

-Lil' Charlie

From The Beat: We hope that you don't get too down, because if we forgive you for your sins, we're pretty sure God will to. On the other hand there is nothing wrong with expressing how you feel. Let it all out. That's what's writing is for.

Expectations

I got court in March, I expect to get out and when I get out I want to try and get a job and finish high school. My Mom been doing a lot for me ever since I been in jail. I love my Mama to death, she expect me to get out and do better. I'm going to meet her expectations because I love and care for her.

-Big Body

From The Beat: Moms can see your potential, and their love and encouragement is real. You are lucky to have her and to realize how much your relationship means to you. It's worth it to fight for a good life.

My First and Last Time

Drama, this place is nothing but drama.

It's just like high school but hella worst. This is my first and last time. I just really want to get out. I didn't do anything to get in here. I don't belong with these crazy females. Once I get out here I don't ever want to come back. The time I had in here make me see just how I love and miss my life.

-Drama Mama

From The Beat: Yes, let this be your last time in here. Who or what will you have to stay away from in order to make sure that you never get taken away from your life and loved ones again?

Who I Love

I love my dad
He talks to me even though he's mad
I love my mom
She cares about me even though I do wrong
I love God, because he gave me life-that's why I don't kill myself with a knife.
I love the stack,
I'ma leave but soon I'll be back.
I love the saints,
When I focus I feel like I'm going to faint
I love my La-La
I like it when she makes ochata
I love my ya-ya,
She likes to make me enchiladas
I love my cousins
We have good times when we buzzin'
I love The Beat Within
I'm not in here to lose, I'm here to win.

-Jose

From The Beat: It's great you've got a lot of positive things to say about the people in your life. What's not great is how you seem determined or resigned to come back to the hall. If you love the people you write about, it's important for you to be there for them the way they're there for you.

Most Difficult Challenge

I don't have a most difficult challenge because I am constantly faced with new challenges to overcome and there will always be a challenge that may be more difficult than the previous one.

As far as the hall goes it is difficult the first time to some extent, but it doesn't take a whole lot of anything to get by in juvenile hall. You are provided basic necessities. All you have to do is kick back and kill time. Sometimes it is lightweight stressful. But I just look at it as an inconvenience and spend my time here thinking about how I can improve my life, reflect on many aspects of life and my future.

I'm doing my time not letting it do me. I got myself in here so no use complaining now, feel me? Though I can't wait to be free and enjoy summer.

- Chris

From The Beat: We are glad to hear you are not letting your time do you. We'd love to know more about how you can improve your life. What ideas or plans do you have?

Dumbest Thing

What up Beat? This is Devontay. The dumbest thing I ever did was get locked up and become a part of the system.

I hate that I missed a lot of my birthdays in jail because I wanted to be bad and do the wrong thing. I don't regret the things I did, I just regret getting caught. But I just have to think positive so I get out of here and not come back, because where I come from the money is good, but I also got to think about my future because I got goals to become somebody.

I'm going to go to Laney College to play football so I can get transferred to Cal. I'm also going to study business and law but before I can do that I got to stay out of jail and I promise this time is my last.

-Devontay

From the Beat: You've got some big goals which is great to see. It's important though to break it down into smaller pieces - what do you need to do to get into Laney College? What grades do you need and how will you pay for it? Start breaking it down and you can reach those goals.

The Hardest Challenge

I think being in the hall has been the hardest challenge in my life because I have never been away from my family for this long. I'm not quite sure how I'm getting through this. I'm just waiting, waiting to go home, to be with my family.

All I'm thinking about next is to be with my daughter, to raise her. I count the days until my release to be with her again. But the time goes by slow.

-B-Daddy

From The Beat: Time can go by really slow if you're not busy. Sitting around in a cell won't help pass the time. Think of things you can do to be productive in the mean time - maybe reading, or even thinking and planning in your head. What is it you need to do to raise your daughter right? Start planning for it now so you'll be ready when you get out.

My Biggest Challenge

Yes, being in jail is one of my worst challenges, because I can't see my daughter and that is hard for any mother or father that is away from their child. I haven't seen her in almost 6 weeks. I haven't heard from her and it is one of my hardest and most fearful challenges in my whole entire life because I don't know what can happen to my daughter or what has happened to my daughter. That little girl is my life and if anything happens to her then I will go crazy but I try my hardest to try not to think about the negative things and think about the positive things.

The guidance counselor here tells me to do little breathing exercises when I start to get upset so I will be able to calm down, but I try to stay positive so I won't think about it so much and make the best of this while I'm in here so I won't feel so sad about being in here and not right so I won't come back here and that's a promise.

-Lite-Brite

From The Beat: We hope you stick to that promise and don't come back. Your daughter needs you, and clearly you want to be there for her. You have the capacity to be an amazing mother, as long as you are able to physically be there for her in the long run.

My Difficult Challenge

My most difficult challenge is being in juvenile hall. I thought I would never come here. I guess I was wrong.

I didn't do nothing very bad to get here, just self-defense with my hands. Anyways I'm getting through this by reading following rules and praying every night.

This is not the place to be people, well teens. It messes up your whole life you miss school family, friends. I know these things because I'm going through it. My mom and lawyer are helping me trying to get me home by telling them I'm a good kid which I am.

The thing I learn is to don't ever come back because juvenile hall is not your second home. Even though it's my first time and I haven't been here long it seems like I been here for months. I just do nothing that you know is gone get you to the hall. Think before you act, follow your first mind and also your gut, it really works, trust me. I miss my family, friends, dance class and real hard program. It's not easy in here. I try not to break down.

After my next court date, I can't stay another day in here. Might think people in here are your friends but they're not. But you're not here to make friends or see friends, you're here to do your time.

-Destiny

From The Beat: You give some really good advice in this piece - to think before you act, and to follow your instincts. But sometimes, these two things conflict with each other. Your brain tells you one thing, while your gut tells you the other. The trick here is judgment - learning when you should listen to which one.

My Most Difficult Challenge

Yeah, I think that being in the hall is one of the most difficult things I've had to do 'cause I'm not used to being locked in a room all the time, and I'm not used to being told what to do all the time. When to eat, when to sleep, when not to talk but the worst part of being in here is that I can't go outside to hang out and see my friends or smoke a cigarette.

It sucks not being free to decide when you get up in the morning or what you do all day. And OMG I hate how I don't really get to talk to my family that much and I never know if something bad happens until my mom visits me or I get a phone call. But it's all good cause I'm going home soon.

-Karen

From The Beat: It must be such a challenge to get used to not having so many freedoms you've been accustomed to your whole life. We're glad you're getting out soon, and hope that you do what you need to do to stay out for good.

My Most Difficult Challenge

My challenge is on the outs. Trying to provide my pregnant girlfriend with food so our baby can be healthy. But all these playa-hating cops be tryin' to stop my hustle when I'm out there grindin' for the right reason.

I can't get a job and it's my responsibility to feed the three of us. I'm just doin' the way I was taught to. I make good money too.

I just can't wait to get out of here to get right back to my corner.

People make it seem easy to just to walk up somewhere and get a job. I am seventeen and I don't go to school. Be real. Who's going to hire me? I got to bring the bread home so until after we get stable I got to grind.

Faith, I love you and to my unborn baby I love you more than anybody.

- Ab

From The Beat: You can get a job. No, it's not easy. But it sounds like you are used to not easy. There are training programs all over the Bay Area - some for youth who've been inside - that can lead to jobs. Make sure you talk to the counselor in the Hall. And if you let us know where you are going home to, we might know some stuff too.

Where do I Go from Here

Sky is the limit for me from here on out. I got a plan to handle my business to the fullest by any means necessary. And to try my best not to let nobody have control of me no more.

I know it's goin' to be a challenge to stay out the system and not get too desperate about anything that's goin' to bring me back quick. But I will not go without anything I can get my hands on with no regrets bout my choices.

-Young Hotta (Brand New)

From The Beat: We hope your plan is legal. We appreciate your motivation and energy, devote yourself to a free future!

Watch Who Your Friends Are

It's funny how my Mom would say "Watch who your friends are" but I would never listen cause look at me now I'm in jail cause the people I thought were my friends said I did something I did not do, so they won't come to jail.

-Fat Boy

From The Beat: Hopefully you will have many more chances to make decisions about who your friends are, and listen to your Mom's advice. We all make mistakes, learn from yours.

My Most Difficult Challenge

On Monday I went to court and they gave me time for my mix time in CYA if I keep on coming to Juvenile Hall. And so when I was in the court room and I started to cry and don't no one know how I feel about it because the people that I could talk to about anything is my sister.

But since I'm here, I can't talk to her but my max time was 6 years but now its 9 years and 2 months. So all that time over me and so all I could do is pray but instead I be hella bad and when the stuff do what they got to do.

-Bubbles

From The Beat: We can tell you've got a lot of raw emotion and a lot you want to say. In the future, work on expressing your thoughts in a more organized way so it's easier for readers to understand. This piece is a little all over the place and is a little confusing, but if you organized your thoughts a bit it could be a really amazing piece.

Getting Money the Right Way

Getting money the right way is my challenge. It seems like when I try to stop hitting licks, I see somebody with something I wanted or somebody else is willing to cash me out for it.

I like hitting lick on dudes who think they about something but when you run up to them, they're not 50 Cent anymore. I like the thrill I get from the rush of adrenaline. At first I was hitting house licks but somebody snitched on me so I started hitting licks on people. I started off with a special snubby, but I sold it and I start robbing dudes with intimidation.

I liked robbing dudes that went to my school because not only did I leave with their valuables, I dip with their pride. But now I'm finding other things to thrill me like sports. So now I'm just doing this little time and try to graduate high school and move on with my life.

-Rashad

From The Beat: You hit on it in that last part - you are a serious thrill seeker. That means you get off on risk, on action, so you could do all sorts of things. Did you ever think of driving an ambulance, or being a fireman? You can get the high without the hurt.

Better Than Home

If my parents were there,
Anything and anywhere was better than home.

I went to school two hours early
Just because it was better than home.

I drank, smoked, lied, stole, and got girls
Just so I didn't have to go home.

I'd stay an extra hour after football practice
Because it was better than home.

I got sent to Juvie,
And even THAT's better than home.

But it ain't the most fun place in the world.
I can live without drugs and alcohol.

I can especially live without Juvie.

But if you were in my shoes, you'd welcome anything.
I'd take anything but home.

Most people say being on the streets can get you put away,

but guess where being at home got me?

I'd rather be the kid that calls home a safe haven,

But, I'm still in Juvie with the worst of them.

anyplace is better than home.

- J

From The Beat: J, if we were in your shoes we'd be trying to figure out how to make our own home. Are you doing that? You are almost eighteen. It might be time for some long-term planning, rather than welcoming any better thing that comes along. What are you thinking about next steps?

Dumbest Thing

The dumbest thing I ever did was putting myself in the predicament, making a way for myself to be put into juvee, when I could have simply went home or not have just went to walk around.

I now see that jail is not the place to be, if you have goals in life, because if you have goals in life like college or otherwise, you can't be a person who sits around all day and is invisible to society- just like people in jail. So to me, this is the dumbest thing I did.

-Denni

From The Beat: You make a really good point about visibility in society. If you want to achieve big goals and be an active part of society, you can't be locked up because that's where you tend to lose your voice, or not get your voice heard. Staying out gives you the freedom and the power to contribute.

When I Get Back to Reality

Man I can't wait to go home 'cause this the last time I'm comin' to jail I know when they let me go I'm be more smarter bout what I'm do and I know who to keep in my circle. I hope I'll be in a good situation to start back goin' to school if not it is what it is so I know what I got to do. I believe in havin' a plan when you get out would keep you focused on handlin' your business. The hard part is keepin' the motivation to keep you goin, if you have that won't nothing get in your way.

-Young Hotta (Brand New)

From The Beat: Don't kid yourself that you're just going to be more slick when you get out...go legit. One way or another you can go back to school, ask your teachers if you aren't sure. You're right you need a plan, be sure it doesn't include possible jail time!

My Excuse

The dumbest thing I ever did was rob a store. That's what got me here today. The thing that pissed me off the most though was I only came up on 200 dollars because one of the hundreds was fake.

I learned not to rob no more because they aint got no money. Also I aint gonna rob no more because I'm stuck in the Max and it's weak.

When I went up in the store I forgot about the cameras. I did all that stupid shhh with the cameras watchin' me the whole time. I was hella drunk when I did all that though, so that's my excuse. Blame it on the alcohol! Keep your heads up friends.

-Luckie

From The Beat: Time to live up to your name! Now you know for a fact that drinking does not lead you to good thinking.

My Challenge In The Hall

The hall is one of the hardest challenges. I am here for the third time. Juvenile hall still stays boring even though nobody said it's fun being in here.

It's a challenge because I'm used to staying with my family: mom, dad, brothers, son, and baby mama. They need me like I need them. I'm sorry for not being with them because it's going to be my son's first birthday in March.

I learned that being in here is not worth it. You can be doing something more important than being in here. And I love my family and I'm sorry!

- Young Richard

From The Beat: Happy Birthday to your son! So what's next, Young Richard? What is the something you can do to keep you with your family?

A New Life

I got one on the way and now I need to have a new life. My child is coming and I want to give my child what I never had, which is a dad.

I'm now know that I have a whole new life coming and I want to change my life now before its too late. I know I have to change now because I have one coming into this world and if I don't change then its over because my child is gonna be calling to other ninja dad while I'm in jail.!

So I know starting right now I need to have a new life.

- Michael

From The Beat: You hit it - you found something to live for, someone to care for. It's like they say, love is the opposite for your hate, and if you listen to it, can your love for your baby help you ignore the hate, and find that new life?

Can't Trust 'Em

If yo' ninja a rob you and get ghost on you
Play the block close but wouldn't bust toast for you
Can't trust 'em

If he talk behind yo' back then laugh in yo' face
Wouldn't stay solid when it's time to catch a case
Can't trust 'em

If you go to jail and he a mess wit' you main honey
Pull the trigger on you 'cause you dream of getting' money
Can't trust 'em

If she there for the money and not 'cause you handsome
An' get you set up for 100,000 stacks of ransom
Can't trust 'em

If they a leave you stuck when you broke and stressed out
A knock ya' momma down for ya' money at her house
Can't trust 'em

If you get shot today and they a leave you stuck
If you gettin' rich and they say it's all luck
Can't trust 'em

-Lil' Purp

From The Beat: The thing is that being broke, and stressed from hood living brings out the worst in everyone, makes people desperate and dishonest. Maybe so long as people have to live dirty in the streets (or think they have to) it will always be a situation where you "can't trust 'em"

God's Blessings

Man, times is hard but they getting better, because I got God on my side and he will make things feel greater. He is there when I need him there. When I call and when he comes he swoops down and blesses me, even when I'm in this hall.

I know I mess up and shouldn't have got in that fight. I was stupid and forgot that I should keep God in sight. I look around this place and I think "I don't belong here" because I'm a child of God, and to bad things I should not hear.

I'm way too blessed and yet I took it for granted instead of letting the seed grow which the Lord had planted. The Bible say in Psalms 37:3 "Trust in the Lord and do good..." But I ain't do that. I did the exact opposite of what I should.

But it's ok because with god I soon will be free, because being locked up just ain't for me.

-Jr. Bishop

From The Beat: Lovely verses. Your faith is something to hold on to in dark times, it can soothe your nights and bless your rhymes, but it's all just words until your match with your deeds, and act in this world as well as your soul needs.

Finally Leaving

Hey, it's me again and yea I'm finally leaving Friday on the 27th, so I'm looking forward to doin' it easy. But things are gonna be tougher, because my girl is gonna give birth to my kid soon after I get out. So that means I have to find a job as soon as I get out of here and get to work. R

Raising a child at my age ain't easy, I barely turned 15 twenty five days ago. So it's gonna be hard to find a job, y'all wish me luck. Well that's pretty much what I wanted to say, so all I got left to do is pray to God, and ask him to put positive things in my path so I can support my kid. And the good part is that my family is gonna support me.

-Lil' Smiley

From The Beat: It's great that you've got support from your family and that you want to do right by your child. Finding a job can be really tough for a young person these days, so make sure you look into programs specifically targeted towards youth, because they will probably be your best bet!

Denial Here, and There

One night I came home to my Baby Momma from a party and I was drinking but I denied it. She kept asking was I drinking. I kept denying it, but it was for her own good.

I went back outside to go get some air. She came following after me. I saw a ninja try to come up to her and feel on her. Out of anger, I beat on him.

She tried to say that it was her friend from a long time ago and she tried to get him off her. But I ended up just leaving her and taking my baby straight up!

-Smokey

From The Beat: It is interesting that you began by an example of your own denial and then went on to give an example of how you believe someone else denied you the truth. Did one denial lead to the other?

Praying Through My Challenge

My most difficult challenge is being in the hall. How I'm getting through it is by praying and just dealing with it. I am thinking beyond the challenge to what is going to happen next.

This is the most difficult, because I'm not used to living this life, where you can't go outside, can't eat when you want, and can't see family and friends when you want. That is what is making it so hard.

The people helping me get through it is my mom by praying. It's helping 'cause I'm doing day by day without stressing. I'm still learning from the experience.

-Bradley

From The Beat: It sounds like you are doing real growing in here. Now you have to step up and follow your prayers with positive actions, making changes to what you do where you go, how you react to stress and who you spend time with. Have you given some thought to these changes?

Here On Earth

When I leave from Juvie after I get a straight release I'm going to return back home and take care of my family and prepare myself to serve a full time Mission because that's my purpose of living here on earth is to preach our heavenly father's word.

I'm Mormon so I'm going to repent from my sins when I get out and I'm goin to stay out of trouble and keep my surroundings positive.

-Halatoa

From The Beat: Did you decide that is your purpose of living? We hope you are listening to yourself, as this is a big step—and one you need to make because you choose it.

Hard To Be Positive

Beat tells me I gotta rap positive

But where I'm from you know that's not how I live
Don't smoke dro' sip bo' sip 'tussin

I'm gonna write this flo' without no cussin'

Ninja's be bussin' 'cause they do no fussin'

They gon' do the crime and then wonder why

Then they wanna cry and wanna lie

See the judge and just wanna hug that white man

But I don't give a f cause I'm a block ninja

They say you a menace to society

Is that really the reality?

Or is it this life

That makes me wanna hate the color white?

but that's all right when I get out I'm gonna smoke a fat
ass blunt on the white man' porch, then smoke a 'port

And go to school and get an A+

And then go to the house and play that three-sixty.

-Caleb

From The Beat: We like the way you worked off those first few inspiration lines we gave you (thanks to Too \$hort) but a word to the wise: If you really want to "hurt" the white man, why would you go and do something illegal on the porch so he'd have an excuse to put you in jail? Becoming successful is the best revenge, don't you know?

Staying Out of the Street

My most difficult challenge is staying out of the street late night. The part that is hard about staying out of the street late is my friends. They always calling my phone or texting me, telling me that there is a party around the block or that all the homies are kicking it back. And all the things that your friends tell you, it just makes you go out late at night.

-Rigoberto

From The Beat: Tell them, "don't call me or text me to invite me out. I gotta stay in 'cause I'm making that change." If they can't help you go positive, then they are too caught up to BE your friends, even if in their hearts they got love for you.

My Cousin Got Caught For What I Did

The dumbest thing I ever did was rob people with my cousin. We used to do it every day till he got caught robbing them. The second time was riding on the bike, and this lady was getting out her car.

Her keys were in her hand and I took them thangs out her hand, rode out of where I was and I left my cousin and he went back to where I snatched the keys from and got caught for what I had did that day.

-Lil' P

From The Beat: Did your cousin end up having to do time? Did you talk to him about it? After you did this "dumbest thing" did you quit committing crimes?

Frustrated

What's up Beat. My most difficult challenge is bein' in here for some spit I didn't do. It feels like the judge and his henchmen aka probation is out to get me. They always tryna dictate somebody's life, thinkin' they know best for the next man's life.

But little do they know that wherever they put us on and we don't wanna be there, we ain't gon' listen and we just gonna act up and rebel.

-Sean

From The Beat: We feel your stress. But wait, WHO gets hurt when you rebel? The judge? Hell no, he drinks his wine and sleeps at night no matter what you do. Probation? They don't care if you act up. So who gets hurt? Just you and the people you love. Is that what you want?

My Dreams

My dream is to become very successful. I'm gon' finish high school, take extra classes-I'm gon' go to school to be an x-ray technician. I like the bones and I think this one of the easiest jobs to have. I'm gon' try to be something in life, I'm not trying to be another statistic end up dead or in jail for life. I want to be a black statistic in college. I got to fulfill my dreams.

-Young Boobie

From The Beat: We wish you all the luck in the world Boobie, and hope if we ever need an x-ray, that you're the guy.

Ma One and Only Boo

Ay baby girl, how you doin'?
I'm really into you and on some real talk I ain't foolin'
You got me like ooin'
'Cause you knowin' you a dime
And you been on ma mind,
That's why I'm tryna spend time
And yes you a dime, you just like a gift
And with a magic genie I would only need one wish
Remember our first kiss, it felt so right,
And you tha' one I want for that rest of my life
It sounds so right, it sounds so true
And I don't need the world,
All I really need is you
Ma ride or die chick, ma baby boo thick
And anytime I want it I make that thang hit
This song really hit, this song real true
This song goin' out to ma one and only boo

-Young Savage

From The Beat: The side you show here is smart and loving and knows how to flow, but then there's another side of you that's violent and trying to hurt everyone, including himself (we didn't print that piece). Which is the real you?

Goin'to ROP

When I leave I'm going to ROP cause I'm going to a group home 'cause the judge don't want me to go home. The person I miss the most is my girl Marisa 'cause I'm in here she all alone in the outs. I wish I was with her and I love her and miss her.

-Churro

From The Beat: Can you make the group home work for you and complete your program there?

The Sun Seems Dim

Being in jail feels like cold days in hell
I feel surprised when I get mail but the food in here is stale
So I'm waiting for these doors to open
Having faith and just hoping for freedom
Praying to God for my friends to meet him
When we go outside the sun seems dim
In my heart I know I'm gonna win
Even though chances are slim
So I try harder every day
Just thinking I'm gonna get off the crooked road to the straight
And always be real and stay away from the fake
Stop risking chances that I don't have to take.

-Stephan Jr.

From The Beat: Great rhymes and wise observations, Stephan! What would the straight road look like? Have you got ideas on where you would go to to look for work, what school to go to, which people to stay away from?

Where I'm Going

...is Rita. I really don't care but the courts messed me in court, feel me. I'm a young savage ninja that's gonna bounce back. I'm in here for something I didn't do, but I can't do nothin' about it, so I gotta do this time and thug it out and do this time. That's all I gotta say.

-Lil' Rolo

From The Beat: What will help you do the time Rolo? Can you work toward college, finish high school...start learning a trade? We hope, of course that your sentence may change—and think that having something to challenge you and work toward will help.

Love For Me

Love me for who I am.
Love me for being my own man.
Love me for keeping the block lit,
love me for holding down my strip.
Love me for every thing I did,
love me for everything I'm saying love for me for staying solid again.
Love to Obama for being so great I got love for him, for everything he makes.
Love me for staying real and never fake, love me for holding my side down,
love me for holding down them rounds,
love me for holding down my title, my crown.

-Dirt Laden

From The Beat: You are asking for love, and we at The Beat have a lot of love for you too. We have so much love for you that we want to see you succeed in this life. That's why it makes us sad to hear you say "Love me for keeping the block lit, love me for holding down my strip."

From The Dumbest To The Smartest

Juvenile hall is nothing like the funniest
what I did to get here is something like the dumbest
I realize it's a lot more in the world to see
living in million dollar mansions
a lot on my mind a lot of special things
I feel it's time for me to turn the dumbest to the smartest
to stay away from the street can't he gonna be the hardest
I'm gonna do what I have to keep my mind strong
and stay on a positive side no matter what goes on.

-Jb

From The Beat: So you've told us about the dumbest things you've done - now tell us what are the smartest things you've done? And what are some smart things you intend on doing?

Dumbest Thing: Opening that Door

My name is Jb. I'm a young black man. The dumbest thing I ever done in life was open the back seat of a police car to let my three potnas out. The police front door was cracked with a foot hanging out, he hopped out and start chasing us, then they had the whole block surrounded.

A cop we call Dirty R hopped out and pulled a gun on us and said, "get down!" I kept running. Another officer tazed me and then the rest came and start beating me with billy clubs and kicking me with boots.

They caused a fractured rib and great bodily injury ... they released me from the hospital because of the damage they caused. One of my potnas got caught and two got away.

-Jb

From The Beat: Man, this is an intense story. How much time did you have to spend in the hospital? Are your ribs OK? Did you ever file a complaint against the cops who beat you?

The Dumbest Thing I Ever Did Was Get Kicked Out of School

The dumbest thing I ever did was getting kicked out of school. I felt sad when they told me I was getting kicked out. I cried really bad. Well I got kicked out of school because I was getting in trouble too much. I was getting into too many fights. I was going good in school.

I got good grades, like almost a 3.0. I was really smart, but I kept getting in trouble. So now they put me in a continuation school. It was in Hayward. I rode the bus and BART every day. Man I wish I never got in trouble. I want to go back to school.

-Lil' Shadow

From The Beat: Are you studying and doing school here in Juvy? Have you talked to your PO about trying to get back into your own school? Because like you say you are a smart person, you should be in a place where you can study and succeed. What will it take?

Helping My Family

The dumbest thing I ever did once when I was walking down the street in seeing all of my people from the block, and then that's when I started acting bad and shhhh.... like damn now that I look at it now I'm locked up doing time while I'm supposed to be helping my mom and dad and sisters and brothers.

The other dumbest thing that I ever did was call my mama a B. And when I called her that, she slapped the hell out of me but anyways when I called her a b-- she called me a dumbass h-, and b- That was the first time I ever did that in my life.

-Tajanique

From The Beat: You've had a few rough experiences lately... maybe this time locked up has been a good time out for you - giving you some time to think about your life, and about what you want to get done?

I Love Myself

I love myself and I don't care what nobody thinks of me. I am beautiful and worthy of being loved. I love myself on and the way I look I am a true diva deep within and she's coming out to shine.

-Ree-Ree

From The Beat: There's an expression: Love is a verb not a feeling. So tell us how you turn your love into actions. How do you treat yourself, what do you do?

Smoking At School

The dumbest thing I ever done was smoke at school and not get caught! In a way it's cool because I didn't get caught up but I kept on doing it so I am on my way to getting caught! It's all bad if I do 'cause I will be in deep trouble. Don't do it, real talk. Learn to stop the first time.

-Jorge

From The Beat: This is a wise piece Jorge. Not getting caught made it easier for you to do it again and again. Are you ready to take your own advice, make a change in your actions?

Getting Into The Hall

The dumbest thing I ever did is what I did to get in the hall. I say it's dumb but other people said they would have done the same. To rob somebody with a ski mask is dumb especially when it's on top of your head.

-Lil' G

From The Beat: We totally agree with you. But we all make dumb mistakes sometimes, so it's good to admit it and move on!

Life as a Teenage Mother

Here I am sitting in juvenile hall, wondering what's going on with my baby.

How's she doing? When am I going home? Here I sit suffering the consequences for my actions. Mad because I feel I shouldn't be here, but my action placed me here. Now I'm thinking if I can go back I would have never did what I did so I can go home with my baby and be a better mother. I can't wait to go home to my baby and start living my life right.

I have been locked up for one month and two weeks and two days and miss my baby girl Aliyah. Before I got locked up, I was thinking about what I was supposed to do when I got out of my program and my daughter was always telling me with her expression not to get in no trouble, "because I don't want to see you locked up!"

And look at me now. I'm locked up in this juvenile, and I want to tell all you guys here and juvenile that be in this place, it's bullshhh. Listen to your family, your daughter or son or somebody else...

-Baby Thickness

From The Beat: We hope you are reunited with your little girl soon, you need each other! But have you had time to think about how you got in trouble this time, and what you can do to make sure it doesn't happen again?

Unreal

I'm supposed to be getting' out soon so hopefully I get to the house first and after I don't know.

But hopefully I get to where I need...."cause I feel after bein' here I hope I never come back cause I know how I feel about here and it's way past bad. Most people in here is fake and lie about most of their image on the outs.

-Brian

From The Beat: Make some plans about what to do when you are released to be sure you won't come back. For example, finish school, and get a job. You don't need to worry about other people there, just take care of getting your life and self together.

The Dumbest Thing I Did Was...

The dumbest thing I ever did...was when I took my uncle's laptop and sold it. I only got 200 dollars and I got caught the same day I sold it. I ended up getting a black eye and he took my 360 dollars and kept it. It also made him not be able to trust me alone in his house. The only reason why I sold the laptop was to get some money for a brand new pair of Blazers. They let me keep them, but for a few months I was in a bunch of trouble with my whole family.

-Yung Dri

From The Beat: Wow, that is pretty dumb, but it sounds like you learned from your mistake. Do you remember what you were thinking at the time? Did you think he would assume someone else took it?

To My Girl

I love you so much that I don't even know how to explain it to you. For one thing that I'm pretty sure is that I can't live without you, girl: you are the main part of my life, and that I don't know how to go on with my life without you so please don't leave me and don't cheat on me. 'Cause I know once you left me, all I have is that empty house with a broken heart!

-Chao

From The Beat: Love is a wonderful and painful thing. As wonderful as she may be, always always remember that you can and will survive if things don't turn out well between you two.

Stupid In A Stolo

One of the dumbest things I've done was drive a stolo with the wrong person. I was smashin' around the block, ya'msayin', doin' my thang with some of the thugs. Then my big homie was lookin' for his lil' brother and his lil' brother was in the car with another homie. Then his mom came out lookin' for him too.

Then someone told tem that he was in the car with the other homie. Then when I was drivin' by they house, the brotha tried to but the car window. Then I stopped and later the mom started swingin' at me, an' I was like, "Ah, shhhh!" an' I smashed off.

-Jerry Geez

From The Beat: We think it's kind of stupid to be driving a stolo, whoever you're with! We wonder what your reaction would be if a car belonging to your mom was stolen. How would you feel? What makes stealing a car all right?

They Know Who I Am

The dumbest thing I ever did was becoming involved with the system. Why? Because now "they" know who I am. That isn't good. Not only that, but they know mostly everything about me.

How I'm getting up out this system? Well, I got to oblige with what the man (the judge) tells me to do I got to platy my part in by doing what is right for my life

-Nicoya

From The Beat: You have turned from a boy to a man. By doing what you know you have to do — whatever the judge orders — you will slowly remove that target you allowed to be painted on your back, and be able to take your place in society as a responsible man and father.

Every Man For Himself

Man, what up with The Beat? Chea, you know this yo' boy holding it down in here. I'ma give it to you raw from a real ninja point of view. My most difficult challenges was turnin' my back on my ninja. The only reason it was hard 'cause I was true to my fam. I was the one holdin' that block down at one, two in the morning when my ninjas was in the house with they mama, or on home house watch.

Then them ninjas stop lovin' the block, put the girl before the block. Then it hit me that it's every ninja for itself. So to all real ninjas in the g-thank, if you got ninja, trust them ninjas to a point of view.

-Terrance

From The Beat: We think you should worry less about what anyone else is doing, and focus on your own choices. If you're out on the block at one or two in the morning, you're bound to be spending some time behind these thick walls, whether anyone's doing it with you or not. Have a little less respect for the block (which loves nothing) and have a lot more respect for yourself. You're worth it!

We Need Family Therapy

My most difficult challenge right now is me. When I get out, I'm going to my aunt's house. Me and my aunt have problems. Everyone knows that, even my lawyer. My aunt refuses family therapy. She refuses to get help. Well, I'm going to have to put up with her and her girlfriend, for like three months or so, until I'm sixteen and a half. Then they are going to transfer me to transitional housing. I pray that God will give me strength to stay and not run.

-Angel

From The Beat: God has already given you the strength you need to resist the temptation to run. We can see that strength in what you write. As adults, we often have to put up with situations at home or work that stress us out, but you can handle three months. What would you like to accomplish with your aunt at family therapy?

Playing For Keeps

Man, forget chu suckas. Talk is cheap. Yappin' like you know what it is. You better be careful how you choose ya words and bust ya moves, using ya head an' not cho heart. Remember this shhh ain't to be loved. You can be thuggin' but this shhh ain't to be played with. I'm playing for keeps.

-Shawny B

From The Beat: Like atomic war, the only way to win is not to play in the first place. And just like countries who go to war and lose, this truth is one that it seems you won't understand until you lose everything. What a tragedy!

A Smart Mouth Will Get You Hurt

Well, I'ma take a break on this gangsta shhh an' I'ma talk to whoever writes the remarks. Even when we write something positive, y'all got something negative.

One day I was writing about my son, which I'm proud about. The Beat says, "We hate reading about babies that are brought into this world by babies that can't take care of themselves," because I'm in here for taking care of my son. He was sick. I took him to the hospital an' did not make curfew.

My ninja said he wanna change his life when he gets out, an' guess what The Beat says? "How are you s'pose to change your life while you in here?" I mean, that says y'all ain't tryna listen to what ninja got to say. Instead of putting us down an' shhhh, it's tough love. Then they're just making people feel worse than they are, not to mention we are in jail, so we feel even worse. So I gone.

-We All Gotta Change, Including You

From The Beat: We appreciate this feedback (though not the implied threat in your title). Sometimes, we are harsher than we mean to be. Maybe it's the 20th piece we've read about babies at home with no responsible man there to help; maybe we've seen the same boy coming back again and again, and it frustrates us. If we take our frustration out on the next writer, that's not good, so we apologize for making you feel worse than you already feel. We definitely applaud you for taking your son to the hospital when he was sick, but we still wish that boys your age (and girls, too) would understand that raising babies is a full-time job, and should not be undertaken by people who still have a curfew.

I Can Only Tell Myself I Need To Change

What's up, Beat? This yo' girl, Yung Moonie, ya dig? My most difficult challenge is being in the hall. I'm always facing being caught up in the hall, and it seems I can't be able to just choose the life I wanna live. I feel I can only tell myself I wanna change, no one can tell me I need to change. This is my most difficult challenge in my life I'm living in society.

-Yung Moonie

From The Beat: It sounds like you're struggling to decide what you want from life. You're not ready to change ("no one can tell me I need to change"), but at the same time, you want to "choose the life I wanna live." Sometimes, it's necessary to sacrifice something to get something we want more in our future.

My Most Difficult Challenge

My most difficult challenge was being away from my mom for about one week and a couple of days. I am getting through it, because she visits me every day, and when I get a chance, I call her and talk to her. Yes, I am thinking beyond that, and what I want to do when I get out. Right now my family is helping me overcome this big challenge.

-Brittany

From The Beat: You cannot tell us much in just four sentences, Brittany, and next time we want you to write a lot more. For example, what is it you are thinking about doing (and not doing) when you get home that will keep you home?

One Day I'll Be Somebody

I ain't no super banger, I'm just who I am. I represent what I believe in. I claim where I'm from, but that don't mean I can't be nice... Yes, I do bang, and if you ask me why, I bet you won't understand or bother listening to my story...

People look down at me 'cause I bang. They don't know. One day I'ma be somebody.

-Free Me

From The Beat: We don't know if we'd understand your "why I bang" or not, but we do know that you are already somebody. You don't have to wait. Our worry is that if you wait too long and keep banging, you'll make that one wrong move that will leave you locked for years, wishing you'd made a change, but too late!

This Ain't Made For Me

My most difficult challenge is to change my ways. As I try to, I think it is impossible. Rambo seem to be too set in his ways. Every day I still strive to be a betta man for society, so they could let a ninja out. The crazy part is I love being me, and I'm neva go change, so I think I was born to fail in this frail-ass world.

I'ma continue to do my thang 'til the day I die, so let's see the outcome while I still breathe. I shook the world at the tender age of 16. will I destroy it at 21?

-Rambo Rob

From The Beat: Nobody knows what tomorrow will bring, not even you RR! Change is an absolute certainty — the only question being, will you be in charge of the change or will you give that power to someone else? And, when you say you love being you, does that include loving being locked up? That comes with the territory, so we hope you love it, too.

My Most Difficult Challenge

My most difficult challenge is being in juvi. It's such a struggle, but one day I'll be out. I'll be free. It is a challenge being here 'cause I would like to be with my baby mama and my kid I rather smell the fresh air of my block. So next time I'm in the street, I won't do no stupid shhh.

A'ight, I'm out. Peace.

-Malo

From The Beat: Yes, you'll be out and free, but what happens then? You have a baby now, so how will you live your life differently when you get out? How will you meet your responsibilities?

Chasin' Money

From my perspective, money is everything to me. Money can't buy love, but I'm not ready for that commitment at this time. I'ma continue to do what I do best. You could lose money chasin' women, but you can't lose women' chasin' money.

-Gm

From The Beat: What do you mean you can't lose women chasin' money? You were chasin' money when you landed in here. How many women have you found inside? If "what you do best" lands you in lock-up, then maybe it's time to consider doing something else best...

RIP, Daddy

To my daddy. I miss you so much. But now that you are gone, I am not doing good in school at all. I am trying, but it is hard since you been gone. I need you. I love you.

Mommy is doing good. Daddy, I am in jail. It is not good at all. I want to go home. You know you are still my Ride or Die. I miss you. RIP, Daddy. I miss you.

-Jalissa

From The Beat: What a sad letter to your departed father. If he could come and sit on your bed and talk to you for a few more minutes, what would he be telling you to do, and not to do? How can you make him proud of you?

Lay In My Bed

I don't wanna fight

I would rather kiss you

Come into this room

And let me show you how much I miss you

What I gotta do to show you that I need you

Baby, I'm back, do whatever you want to

Please spend the night

I wanna make this right

So what you leaving for

Shawty, close the door

We oughta be making love

Instead of breaking up

C'mon Baby, let me show you I'm for real

Lay in my bed

Remember when I said

I would never hurt you

You ain't gotta cry

I now all the things you've been through

Baby, I ain't into satisfying nobody but you

Touching on nobody but you

Everything I'm saying is true

Please spend the night

I wanna make this right

Girl, what you leaving for

Shawty, close the door

We oughta be making love

Instead of breaking up

C'mon Baby, let me show you I'm for real

Lay in my bed

-Ballard

From The Beat: Do you know the song by Mick Jagger (the Rolling Stones) called "Let's spend the night together"? Your song/poem reminds us of the refrain from that hit: "Let's spend the night together/ Now I need you more than ever/ Let's spend the night together now."

Von's Strategizing

What's good with The Beat? This Von, the grown man. They tryna watch the thug drown, but that ain't gone happen, 'cause the thug gonna keep his head above water, straight up. The kid gone float like a boat. They tryna swipe the kid like Katrina did in New Orleans, an' leave a ninja file a catastrophe.

This system just be tryna set the thugs up for failure, tryna mess a thug' future up. But I'ma try my best not to let that happen. I'm outchere. Get at me.

-Von

From The Beat: We wish you had given us some of the details of how you plan to "float like a boat." Even if everything you accuse the system of is true, aren't you helping them by doing things you knew could lead here? If they're setting you up for failure, what's your plan to frustrate them and succeed?

It's A Rap

My moms came through today. Told a brotha they can't find a grouper for me. But it ain't nothin', though, 'cause when I get out it's a rap for sucka ninjas and for anybody else tryna stop my shine.

But it's only one girl I wanna see when I get out, and that's my baby girl. You know who you is.

-Young Sammi

From The Beat: We're not impressed with words about what you plan to do to anyone who will stop you. You are stopping yourself from shining, and no one else is doing it to you!

Worth It? Hell No!

Being inside the hall is not a challenge to me... the challenge is not seeing my baby boy's birth, and seeing my family. Yes, the crime I did to be in here is the dumbest shhh I ever did. If you ask me was it worth it... no! Hell no!

Yeah, the money was a'ight, but my time inside here... priceless! Free me 'cause I ain't no animal to be locked in a room. At least let me see my kid.

-Free Me

From The Beat: It sounds like you're beginning to think more like an adult and less like a kid! Knowing that whatever you got wasn't worth the consequences is the beginning of real change — change in thinking and in acting. We hope you and your son are together very soon, and that you continue acting like a responsible adult.

Cool As Hell In Here

Man, I been in YGC for five months now. Man, they got me in the max unit, but I'm holdin' it down in here. It's a ninja in my unit is cool as hell. It's like we are all brothers. But it's cool as hell in here. It be crackin'. Hella units be complainin' to come to gym wit' us. They scared.

-D-Rolla

From The Beat: Most people hate being here, so why do you find it so "cool"? Why are the other units afraid to go to the gym with y'all? Does this unit always win?

Chasing Money

What's up with The Beat? This yo' boy Lil' Junk live an' direct from the hall. But yeah, you know a ninja 'bout to go to Vegas and make shhh jump out there for a minute. 'Bout to see what kind of money out there, ya know. When a ninja come back, he go be eating!

Other than that, I'm just go be out there seeing how the money come in. Gone, 'til we meet again.

-Lil' Junk

From The Beat: We hope the money chase doesn't trap you... again. There's a reason why more money is going into prison and jail building than in schools. Don't be part of that reason!

Stop Being On The Block

What's god with The Beat? I just want to talk to al them goons out there. Watch the company you keep, lil' homie, 'cause ninjas is really telling on each other. Them white people talking them football numbers, and y'all ain't ready for that. So if you ain't ready to die for yo' 'hood, you need to stop being on the block.

-Low Boi Acie

From The Beat: This is very good advice. Our only comment is that we wish you would substitute the word "I" every time you use the word "you." Are you ready to die for the 'hood (that won't remember you once you're gone)? If not, then YOU need to stop being on the block.

When I Was Young

This ya boy Coop. When I was young, I lost my mom. That really hurted me when I got older. But look at me now. But yeah, love life keep yanking until the day the judge lam the black gavel on me. But that will never happen because I'm too smooth. I'm not webbie though, so yeah, everybody keep they head up and sear a helmet because Coop hit hard.

-Ya Boy Coop

From The Beat: It's rough when you lose your mother at any age, but really hard when you're young. But if your mother could come back and spend ten minutes with you now, what do you think she would tell you? Would you be able to hear what she has to say?

Beef Isn't For Me

Yeah, this ya boy Young Kata. Man, people be hatin' on me because I'm smaller than the rest, and when it comes down to beef, I run from the scene. I talk a lot, but just for exertion from peers. I know this beef stuff won't do anything but have me dead or in jail because of my mouth. That's why I feel it's not me.

Sometimes when I'm in my room, I just sit, think and cry about what I've done. Everybody seems to not like me because I'm more of the squarish type quiet person, and I'm usually not accepted by my homies in 'the 'hood.

-Young K-

From The Beat: We admire you for being so honest — and for avoiding beef. (In fact, you were a little too honest, so we took out two sentences to keep you from having to beef...) What do you want out of your life? Do you have a plan to achieve your goals? Tell us about it.

A Girl Named Karen

I met this girl, her name was Karen
She kept lookin' while I kept starin'
Baby came through wit' my homeboy, Darin
Her booty was stuffed in the jeans she was wearin'
She never left, he cut out
I know you all know what I'm talkin' about

-D-Rolla

From The Beat: If you're talking about sex, and we think you are/ Don't let your dreams take you too far/ First things first — you've got to get out of the hall/ 'Cause here there's just boys, boys, boys from wall to wall!

The Grimy Side

Check it out, lil' dawg. It's ya guy Boxes fa y'all who don't know live an' direct, and I'm gone keep it like that. Don't know 'bout ch'all, but, uh, yeah, this bear finna be hybernatin' for a while... not too long, though. I'll be back sooner than later, so fo' now, catch me sucka duckin', yo.

Oh, and on the outs I stay with that thang, LOL. Yeah, y'all know wha's up. I ain't tryna spook ya, mayne. Come outside and play, but chu need to beware 'bout them harks in the water 'cause the deeper you go, it gets darker and darker.

Last but not least, three lil' dawg — just lil' dawg — lessons: Touch that stove, expect to get burnt; neva cry over spilt milk; and y'all tuck y'all noodles 'cause they can get spilt. Ninjas is hungry. I know when I touch down gotta get my weight up.

-E-Boy

From The Beat: We hope that your hunger won't lead you to take stupid risks with your freedom when you get out of here. Some people can feed themselves, but they're never satisfied, always wanting more. That's what leads to trouble!

My Most Difficult Challenge

The halls is the most difficult challenge I have ever faced. I'm getting through fine, but I've been better.

I been thinking beyond this experience, and I know that this is my senior year and I planned to graduate on stage. Now, I don't know what's gonna happen. My family is helping me out a lot during this time, but hopefully it will all be over soon.

-Ballard

From The Beat: We hope you get to graduate with your class, but even if you don't, you WILL graduate and move forward with your life. Remember how much your family has helped so you can't return the favor when you get out and resist whatever temptations are out there that could, once again, take you from those that love you.

Almost Lost A Soulja

What's up, Beat? This yo' boy Davey-D holding it down in max. let me tell you about how I almost lost a soulja. Well, back in March of last year, I almost lost my soulja Uncle Cec. My ninja was shot more than a dozen times, and that tore me up when I seen it on the news. If these young ninjas only knew, I think they would stay out the way of these two gorillas.

A lot of people know when Davey-D and Uncle Cec are together. You don't cross our path. Me and Uncle Cec always rode together no matter what.

Davey-D and Uncle Cec 'til the death of it. I love you, Cec bra!

-Davey-D

From The Beat: Don't you see that guns don't respect anyone! A child can pick up a gun and use it, even against the biggest homie on the block! We're sorry Cec got hit, but we sure hope you don't follow through on your threats of revenge (which we took out), because that only keeps the circle of violence and death in motion, and too many young people have already lost their lives or their freedom to this madness!

Time To Change

The dumbest thing I ever did was come to juvenile hall. When I barely came here, like one week after, I called my girl and fund out that she was pregnant. It was when I started thinking that I got to change when I get out. I'ma stop doing bad shhh, because now I'ma be a dad. That's why I'm telling you, all my ninjas, to keep yo' head up. No matter what, always do the right thing, you feel me.

-Young Catracho

From The Beat: We hope that you are able to keep the promise you make in this piece and take on your new responsibility as a father. Sacrificing the things you like to do (but which lead to jail) is what it means to be a parent. Are you up to the task? For your sake and your baby's, we hope so.

Day Care

If a ninja talking that beef shhhh, he really ain't about his shhhh. Being in the halls ain't shhhh, lil' dawg. This shhhh is day care, my ninja, for real. Ninjas be in here lying like hell, like they do this and do that, but they ain't no goon. Trust me, 'cause if you're a goon, everyone go know you are you and got to talk about yo' shhhh.

One of the dumbest things I ever did in my life was come to the halls. This shhhh just wasting my time you feel me. They need to let a goon go and just get off a ninja's back.

-Low Boi Acie

From The Beat: We took out the threatening nonsense at the beginning. But what remains isn't much more than nonsense! Who cares if you're a "goon" or not; you're a slave to people telling you when to eat, sleep, talk and shut up! What kind of a good is that? And saying that they need to let you go and get off your back is just more childish thinking. Pray to yourself! You are in control of whether you live in freedom or slavery. Time to choose!

Finally, Some Good News

Yo, what's up with The Beat? I've been down for eight months now, and I finally got some good news. So far, my attorney thinks we might win the 707. then I'm gonna have my disposition. I could go to YA or George Jr. in Pennsylvania. It's an 18-month program. I've already been accepted. Hopefully, I'll get to go. Keep your heads up.

-White Ninja

From The Beat: We hope you win your 707 and get to go to this program because we can see that you have the right attitude to make the most out of wherever they send you. If you go with an open mind and try to soak up all that's positive while walking away from all that's negative, we think your future will be much brighter than your past. Good luck!

No Smoking

What up with The Beat Within? Well, the stupidest thing that I did was get high because every time I get high, I do stupid-ass shhh to get me in trouble. So, thanks for me, I'm on probation. They said I can't smoke no more, so that's good because if somebody make me stop smokin' by threatening me by saying I'm go lock you up in YGC, so I'm go stop until I get off so I can do good.

But it's ya boy Speed saying peace to The Beat.

-Speedy

From The Beat: So, now that you know the consequences if you keep smoking, you can control that habit to avoid the consequences. The same is true about anything that leads you to trouble — you are strong enough to control yourself so you don't end up here again!

The Dumbest Thing

The dumbest thing I ever did in my life is to make me here now in juvenile hall. It isn't right that my PO is like my second dad or mom. Everybody make mistakes, but some don't learn from their mistakes.

I thought about what I did to mess up the rest of my life. Police running through my family personal items. PO telling me to come in the house whenever they want to. Also progress reports every week. Life ain't right without help. I'ma be back in a minute. Love y'all, and keep yo' chin up. Gone!

-B Hunter

From The Beat: You're right, a lot of people never learn from their mistakes. We're glad to read that you are not one of them. What's the biggest lesson you've learned from being in here, and what's the biggest change you plan to make in your life on the outs?

Appreciate What You've Got

This has been my most difficult challenge because now that I have a family of my own, that needs my support now more than ever. I'm stuck in here wondering how my family is, or if they're OK without me. My family is the most important thing in my life.

It's crazy how your life can change forever in just a few moments. You can be living large, and the next minute you're locked up. Appreciate what you've got because when you lose it, it's hard to get it back.

-Nothing But Time

From The Beat: It's good advice to appreciate what you have. Even better advice is to stop doing the things that cause you to lose those things. Think about what's really important, and don't risk losing it.

The Dumbest Thing I Ever Did

The dumbest thing I ever did was walking toward the cops. I went to my friend's house on a Saturday, and we went to the park. On our way, we saw my friend's friend, so we just kept walking to the park. An hour later, he came and he was talking about someone pointing a gun to his face. So I was like "I don't want t be a part of this." Two seconds later another friend came, so we were in front of dude's house, the one with the gun, and then out of nowhere the cops came.

One of my friends had a screwdriver, so he ran and threw it in the bushes. I was running up the hill. My friend was caught by the cops, so I walked back to the cops. We didn't do nothing, so the cops let us go.

-Steven

From The Beat: You told a good story, Steven, but since the cops let you go, we can't understand why you say this is the dumbest thing you ever did. You must have done something even dumber in your life... 'cause here you are!

Damn My PO

Yeah, wha's good with The Beat? I'm on the low blowin' 'dro.

Man, the system tryin' to play me right now. This my first time in this hole, and they got me in here for hell a long. I'm 'bout to go to a group home for 18 months, but it's better than bein' in here. But yeah, I'm out this g than mayne. That's why I said, "Damn my PO."

-Lil' Pin

From The Beat: Is it your PO's fault that you are here? You have to address your own responsibility for the situation you find yourself in since you can only change yourself. The system (the PO) will not change, so it's up to you.

Hope And Love

What's up with The Beat? I'm just doing this time, feel me. I miss the fam and the homies. They got us locked up like animals in this thang, but hey, I'm a beast. I'm a goon.

Okay, you a goon, but what's a goon to Coop? Nothing... I love The Beat. Ya boy,

-Coop

From The Beat: We had to take out the personal communication to another person in this institution. As for the rest, we're not sure what you're complaining about. You call yourself "a beast" and then say they lock you up like an animal. Isn't that what you're boasting that you are?

Droppin' Like Flies, Dawg

Man, this ya boy Daddy-O, mane. Nowadays, ninjas droppin' like flies all around, mane. Mostly, ninjas poppin' them gums and ain't 'bout poppin' them guns, ya dig. If ninjas ain't 'bout it, then get lost, ya heard me. To keep it real, it ain't too many real goons around no mo', mane.

Ninjas who call theyselves gangstas die fast, ya dig. But me and my ninjas ain't 'bout poppin' them gums. We 'bout poppin' them guns, ya dig.

-Daddy-O

From The Beat: Tell us, why should any youngster reading this take advice from someone who has lost his freedom and still brags about how he did it? Any coward can pick up a gun and use it, so we're not impressed by what you and your ninjas are about. It would take some courage to put those guns down. Now that would be some advice worth giving!

My Boys, My Girl, My Case

Wha's up Beat? This is your boy Duende coming from las calles. I'm going to talk about my homies that got locked up, like three days ago. My boys got locked up for stealing a car and possession of a gun. I feel "Forget that!" 'cause I don't like my homies are locked up. I know how it feels to be here en la juvenile. It's their first time and they feel awitados (depressed).

Hell, I'm worried 'cause I got my court tomorrow. I hope I win mi caso and I can get out.

I'm going to tell you Beat un poquito about my vida in la carcel (a little about my life in jail). Now I'm doing good, so next week I'm going to have my family visit. So I'm going to see my girl.

Bueno Beat. You know wha's up with me, still firme in my barrio. A'ight, this vato is out. Al rato.

-Duende

From The Beat: Your English is getting better and better, Duende, but you still have a few things to learn about the system. We're sorry your boys are locked up and awitados, but what did they think would happen for carrying a gun and stealing a car? That's what we mean when we say it's time to start thinking like an adult — which means to understand the consequences of your actions before you take them.

Words Of A Real Ninja

This for my real ninjas...

Neva snitch. Respect ya elders. Believe me, you live longer. My ninja kids, my kids, that's how we live, homie. No man or woman should separate you from ya circle. Keep it trilla if you a gorilla. Wake up to get your cake up. Money, money, money. Be about it. Worship a hundred dollar bill...

Naw, I'm just playin'. For you ninjas that a' with it, you ninjas need to quit it. This jail shhhh don't make you realer than the next man. You got caught. You ain't good at what chu do, ya mean. I'm holdin' it down. Get money, and if a ninja try to stop ya shine, put it on his mind. Money don't mean nothin' if you ain't got respect. It's real in the field, and Tae Money definitely in the field.

Ninjas say what they do and what they gon do. Real ninjas don't talk, 'member that. In the heat of the moment, ninjas freeze up like ice cues. Man, stay ninja hard! Sleepy-ass ninjas. I bet when ninjas be out, they don't even hang out late night. Ninjas be in the house...

I'm a young monsta out there, believe that. I'm full of that shhhh, pills, 'dro... I don't care where you from as long as you real to the bone. I'm a young ninja out here, pure beast. But yeah man, be 'bout cha papa, forget the bullshhhh. Money talk.

-Tae Money

From The Beat: We had to cut so much out of this piece that it's almost not worth publishing! As long as your advice is to stay strapped, stay hard, stay money-hungry, then we will have to keep cutting. Coming from someone who's given up his freedom, that kind of advice can only lead the next child down the path that leads to jail... or worse. That's not what The Beat is about, and we're sorry it's what you're about. Or maybe we don't get what you're trying to say. You wrote, "You got caught. You ain't good at what chu do..." Why doesn't this apply to you? As long as money is your motivation, you can count on handing away a lot more of your precious freedom than you've already squandered.

Da Realiest

What's up with The Beat? You know about me, Young Coop, yeah man, 'bout to be 18 this year and I got about 21 racks left to play. What I'm go do, I don't know yet. I'm kinda stressed out because I'm in here and I can't keep it going for me, ya feel me?

I got a SS Camero on duces, and people be askin' me how I get the thangs I get. I just nod my head and keep it moving because if you tell everybody yo' business, you go fall, feel me. Just know I'm young and got throwback money. I'm talking about '04 money.

Why I talk about money so much because it's something I got, ya dig. And fa everybody who be telling these stories about what they got and be lying, save it for the judge.

Young Coop out this thang.

-Ya Boy Coop

From The Beat: If you go back to doing the things that got you here, then you'll have to build incarceration time into your life's plan, because that's the consequence that you really can't escape. Is giving up your freedom — and stressing while you're locked up — worth the game you're playing? That's up to you to decide.

Most Difficult Challenge

My most difficult challenge is being black on these San Francisco streets. All people look at you like a bad person in life, if you are black. Police look at you an' always think bad stuff. They pass by, mugging you, an' just search you for stuff for being black, and wearing black hoodies and beemies.

-Guay Jr.

From The Beat: Have you developed any methods to make dealing with this racism easier? What can you do to make the police (and others) look at you without thinking that you're a bad person?

Weed

My most difficult challenge is stopping smoking weed. But I ain't trippin'. It's good. I'm going to try my hardest when I get out of here, because I'm tired of keep coming here because of cops. Smoking ain't worth it. I'ma stop, but just until I get off probation, then I'ma smoke like there ain't no tomorrow, because it help me relax and it's my passion. Peace.

-Lil' Hus

From The Beat: Who knows, Lil' Hus, after you stay weed-free while you're on probation, you may free yourself from this addiction and no longer need it to relax. Why not take it one step at a time. Get out of here and off probation without any weed first, and then see what your passions are.

Drug Free

I don't need it
I won't feed it
I can beat it
It can't beat me
It won't be me
I want to live my life freely

-Alejandro

From The Beat: Congratulations on committing yourself to staying sober! We think that's one of the most important decisions you can make for your future. Build on the foundation of sobriety you've been building since getting here, and keep adding to it when you get out there.

Trees And Drink On My Mind

A lot of thoughts going through my mind
Me, in here, just wasting time
I reminisce about all the things I did outside
Smoking trees, getting drunk
Sometimes I think life is bunk
I read in my room, not to stay bored
All the memories I have are all stored
If there's one thing I got to say
Don't get caught up, because it ain't no game

-Leeches

From The Beat: When "getting drunk" is on your mind/ It tells us that trouble is what you'll find/ So many sad Beat pieces begin, "When I got drunk..." / Do you wonder why you stink when you have a pet skunk/ Of all the problems that make your life into a curse/ There's not one among them that alcohol cannot make worse/ We have just one piece of advice that we've been thinking/ Concentrate on finishing school... and quit drinking!

My Difficult Challenge

Mines is keeping my mind sane
I hear these walls talking to me
I see them
Stop! Leave me alone!
But they won't
It's an everyday thing
I'm struggling and hoping that my daughter don't turn the same
So every day I struggle to keep my mind sane

-Chepe

From The Beat: If you actually hear the walls talking, then you should talk about that with someone here (Psychologist? Counselor?) because you may benefit from some medicines that can calm your mind down. If you mean that you hate it here, and that's what the walls are telling you, then listen to what they have to say. The way to stay sane is to stay out of here!

*It's an everyday thing
I'm struggling and hoping that my
daughter don't turn the same*

How I Feel

Obie has its moods, but I feel so separated
When these moods come at me, it feels like I'm going crazy
I feel when I did the right thing, the system went and played me
I thought I had a coo' connection with my PO
And he turned around and did me shady
I'm a boy from the East Bay that do music on a daily
When I started gettin' locked up, my friends went and faded

-Obie

From The Beat: How were you doing the right thing when the system "played" you? Has your PO explained why he did what he did? If your friends "faded" when you came here, then you need new friends. Probably the best friend you have is your music. Let it express all the moods you're feeling.

Stereotypes

I hear those stereotypes about he's from there and I'm from here. Why does it matter what set we're from, or what color our skin is? I mean, as the man said, can't we all just get along.

We have many similarities. We're out there doing the same things, getting arrested for the same crimes, right? Religious or not, we're sinning, hitting each other, causing a ruckus. I ain't saying quit the game. So don't get it twisted.

All I'm saying is: if you want respect, give respect. Do your time and think twice before you act. He who angers you conquers you.

-A

From The Beat: Why not, A... why not take it the next step and acknowledge that 'the game' leads you inevitably to incarceration? Why not quit the game? Someone has to be brave enough to say that 'the game' just isn't working. How many broken families does it take? Would you want your child in 'the game'?

The Right Choice

The greed floats like smoke from incense.
Betrayal flies through friendships like an airplane.
But my passion and spiritual beliefs
are as strong as a storm. Still, screams surface
during the journey. But my soul always makes
the right choice, examining miracles,
shaping my trip to heaven.

-Alexander

From The Beat: Sounds like you have traveling plans. Just don't be in too much of a hurry. Some trips can wait.

*All I'm saying is: if you want respect,
give respect. Do your time and think
twice before you act.*

Smoke Weed All Day

The dumbest thing I ever did was I did not go to school for four weeks straight. I was on pills and weed. Then I will go back to my group home and eat a lot with my boy. I will smoke weed all day with him

To all the readers out there, don't do weed. It messes up you' head bad.

-Angel

From The Beat: How long have you been smoke-free? We hope you are able to build on this foundation of sobriety when you get out of here, because when you mess your head up, the chances of returning to lock-up greatly increase. So, take your own excellent advice!

Stupor

What up Beat, it's Dopey. Well I ain't feeling the topic this week so I'm going to talk about this time I got drunk and fell asleep on some old lady's grass. Well I got drunk off two 211s so I had to go to my pad I watch my little bro then the next thing you know the cops are waking me up say where do I live and I was just two houses away so they let me go.

-Dopey

From The Beat: Frankly, if you aren't going to put any thought or perspective into your Beat writing, it's hard for us to want to put those things into a response to it. You've read in the Beat that we're suffering cutbacks like everyone else, and we can't afford anymore to publish workshop pieces that don't show any maturity, perspective, or value to our readers. We know you can do better, and we want to see that happen.

My Most Difficult Challenge

My most difficult challenge is to stop getting locked up. It's like when I get locked up I miss my family. But when I'm out, the first place I wanna go is to the streets with my 'hood.

But I guess I'm not ready to change. It's sad but true. And this is my last stop at juvenile. The next stop is county. But when I get out on March 28, '09, I'm going to be on house arrest, then get off probation. So, 'til pencil meets paper, late.

-Ceaser

From The Beat: We wish we could come up with magic words to make you realize the seriousness of not waiting to make the changes you know you have to make to secure your future, even though you're not ready to make them. We have seen too many young men (and women) put off the change they know must come, only to make that one "fatal" mistake that puts them behind walls for years at a time thinking, "If only..."

Happiness Without Drugs

What up Beat? Man, I remember hen I used to smoke all the time with the homeboys, kickin' back, losin' track of time, not givin' a shhh what people would say. Every time I did something I needed to smoke, people have confronted me that I have a weed problem. I told them that I could stop at any time. I never came home to my parents 'cause I had respect for them.

But after a while, all that respect went down the drain. My mom used to ask me if I was high, but I always denied it. But in back of myself to myself, I knew I was freakin' blasted as hell. The reason why I deny it is because I never wanted my mom to know that I needed drugs to be happy. I have realized that I don't need drugs to be happy.

-Green

From The Beat: We hope you have the courage to show this to your mother. She will not only be truly happy that you now understand that you don't need drugs, but she will see by your willingness to be honest with her that you are becoming a responsible adult ready to deal honestly with what troubles you.

It's Not My Fault

A what's cracking Beat it's Richy. Well I'm number fifty-nine for the life skills unit. Well I got six months from the judge.

-Richy

From The Beat: Hey Richy, we'd really like to see you put more thought into your Beat writing next week, otherwise kiss writing in The Beat goodbye.

Still Waiting

What's up, Beat? Well, today, just gonna talk about what's going on. Well, there is something that's been on my mind. I just wanna sleep without trippin' about anything. But what I hate soooo much is that every time we have visits, their parents look at me all like weird, and that bothers me a lot.

But my case is still continuing. I have it on March 6th. They finally have more info. now, so now it can continue. I know everyone thinks my case is so serious, but I still know for a fact that I'm getting out, not going to psych nor prison. I have strong faith.

I've noticed a lot of people in this unit have special talent, but thy don't se it; they just throw it away in the trash.

Some day, I'll be with my family again. Just around the corner I got so far. Just can't stop now. I just gotta wait or the perfect time and perfect day. So, just always stay up and hold on to your dreams. Late. I'm out.

-Moe Joe

From The Beat: Faith is a wonderful thing, but don't let it trick you into thinking you know the future for a fact. We hope your prediction that you'll be out soon comes true, but if it turns out to be wrong, don't let that be an excuse for giving up. In other words, your final advice is true, whatever happens in your case: "Stay up and hold on to your dreams."

What's On My Mind Lately

This is Christina. Here's what's been on mind. Well, my mom is going to get married. It hella sucks that I can't be there. I get letters from my sisters talking about it and they sound all excited about it, and they tell me they want me to be there, but unfortunately, I can't. Stuff like this helps me realize why I don't want to be here, or come back. It helps me learn from my mistakes.

I've been here four or five times and it's time for me to grow up. I need to start making the right choices to help me with my future. Missing out on stuff with my family really hurts.

I remember when I was turning myself in. My lil' sis was crying and I remember her saying - you won't see me graduate now. It really hurt hearing her say that, but I'm glad to say that my court went well and I will be there to see it. Whenever I feel down I just think of my family. They make me happy, along with a few others (and a few friends I'm proud to say are more like family). Being here makes me think like crazy. It also helps to separate the real from the fake and who I need in my life and who I don't.

Lately I've also been thinking about some cases that I pray every night go well. I hope and pray my friend gets another chance because I believe and have faith that he will do better. I just hope I'm not the only one who can see that.

-Christina

From The Beat: You missed your mom's wedding, but not your sister's graduation. You're batting 50/50, but that's not good enough. We're glad you're giving your life some real attention now. The more attention you pay, the better it will be. Best of luck to you.

Enough

As I lay myself to sleep, I pray to the Lord my soul he'll keep...

Every day, I pray to the Lord to keep my enemies away. Every night I say my good-night prayer to have a wonderful sleep, but I can't because everywhere I go I hear the voice in my head talking 'bout killing my enemies. Every time we have visits, their parents look at me like Satan's child. The next day, the minors say their mom seen me on the television. Oooohh, I so badly hate it when they say that to my face. I just wanna tell them, "Shut the hell up — no disrespect — but it's my case. You can't help me, so why put your two cents in?"

I used to bang with my sis, but I wanted more than guns and knives. I wanted to be a worshiper by sacrifice, holding them down and turning them into my master. These minors talk about colors like I don't see what the big deal is. I see some wannabees. I don't know if they're joking, but just make themselves look stupid. I'm not a psychopath killa no more, so stop asking questions.

-Moe Joe

From The Beat: You have to find your own peace with yourself, MJ, so that you won't be bothered by what others say or don't see, see or don't see. Who you were is still a part of who you are (but only a part), so you just have to accept that some people will look at you strangely and others will try to push your buttons by telling you things you'd rather not hear. Forget them! Concentrate on you, and if you see someone's parents giving you weird looks, just smile back at them!

Tomorrow

Tomorrow is my next court date. I didn't get out last time, but I'll pray to God that he'll make it good. I've been reading the Bible and found this: "Have I not commended you? Do not be discouraged. Do not be terrified. For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9) If I don't get out, that's fine. If I do, I'll be happy for my entire life. I just know there is hope in the future.

-Thinking good thoughts

From The Beat: We can't even tell you how happy we are to read a piece of Beat writing that includes hope—we read so many in which we have to convince our writers that there is hope to be found, that there is always hope left to believe in. How does reading the Bible inspire you, and how do you think that the beautiful passage you quoted to us relates to language's power to inspire hope and change.

My Challenges

What's cracking Beat, it's Lil' Man writing in this Beat once again. The topic that caught my eye and that was to my liking was difficult challenges.

I have a few, my first one is trying to stay out of the system. This is a difficulty for me because once I get out I go right back to my old habits, like drinking, blazing, going out with the homeboys. My PO ends up failing me next thing you know I'm back in this cage, locked down like some animal.

Secondly is surviving in these San Jose streets. You gotta keep strong, once you walk out your door, you could get taken out the game any minute. Everyday I put my life to risk but it's all part of my life I chose to live. I'm in this game for myself. Well these are my challenges. To all, stay up. Alrato.

-Lil' Man

From The Beat: Well, it sounds to us like you need a third alternative. We appreciate the thoughtful and detailed way you're reflecting upon the challenges in your life in this piece, but have you thought of how you could both live outside the system and outside the way of living that put you in it? Is a way of life that threatens you with another stay in the system every day really worth putting your life at risk, and if not, how can you create another alternative for yourself? The choice is one hundred percent yours, but The Beat is here to help you make a change if you decide you're ready.

My Feel Of Love

When I first met you I was amazed
Your beautiful eyes left me so dazed
There was a lovely shine
When yours met mine
Your hair always neat, never messy
As your body was nothing but sexy
Your lips is what I wanted to kiss
Didn't even know you
And already wanted you as my miss
Your name fit you like Cinderella and her shoe
If that wasn't your name, then a fact wouldn't be true
Tried to approach you with all my game
But came up short and the butterflies I had to blame
Your vibe was strong
And that made me now we belonged
you became a real close friend
Me hoping it got larger and never end
Our relationship grew more and more
Even to the point your smile lifted me from the floor
It was your touch that made my heart melt
Like a chocolate in a stove is what I felt
This feeling I have has to be love
Thank you Cupid and spirit up above
For letting me feel what I feel
And making this feeling so real
I dream of you and me
Sitting in a tree K-I-S-S-I-N-G
Nights I can't stop thinking of you
Days I don't know what to do
If only you knew
How much you run through my mind
How your beauty leaves me so blind
If I was to pour my love in a cup
I would need more than one to fill them up
'Cause my love just grows and grows
Within these walls it never shows
One day you will know
That my love is stronger
Than the Big Bad Wolf could ever blow
[Copyright, 2009; all rights reserved; "Cisco"—This goes to all you people that would love to copy my poem and send it to their girls and claim my skills...]

-Cisco

From The Beat: No question about it, you do have skills... Do you mean, though, that he doesn't yet know how you feel about her? ("One day you will know...") What are you waiting for? Maybe you should send her this declaration of love. We can't imagine anyone has ever said it to her better than you have!

Promising (Again) Not To Come Back

Hey, what's up Beat? The homie Lil' Sharky writing from the max. I know I'm not feeling the topic, so I'm gonna write about me saying since the first time that I came here, I said that was gonna be my last time. But I'm still here.

This I my fifth time torcido (jail), but this time I'm facing a lot of time. I keep thinking of that time when I said that I wasn't coming back. But what can I do? I'm already here. I'm just gonna do my time and I'm not coming back. That's for sure. Ora pues, carnales, I'm out. Un saludo to all the locote (crazies) out there dong time, keep your head up. Al ratos.

-Lil' Sharky

From The Beat: What is going to be different about this promise from the one you made the first time you came here? What makes you so sure that you can keep it this time? What's been the hardest part about staying out of here, what are you doing to make sure you can overcome that obstacle to freedom?

Ouch

The dumbest thing I ever done was when I was drunk, I decided to walk around in the middle of the night and I went to my friend's house and knocked, but he wasn't there so I walked around town and I decided to walk back to my pad I wanted to take a short cut so I jumped the fence. My shirt got caught and it ripped, so then I jumped down with a ripped shirt and landed on a skateboard and fell and the next morning I woke up I had a big bump in the back of my head and a lot of scratches on my back. So that was the dumbest thing I've done.

-Carlos

From The Beat: If this is really the dumbest thing you've ever done, Carlos, then you must be a pretty smart guy, because we've heard a lot worse. How did you feel when you woke up the next morning with a throbbing head and a bruised ego? Have you done other things you regret while you were drunk, and if so, how do those things influence the way you think about drinking? What did you learn from the episode you described?

Our Shoes

I wish "regular" people could spend a day in my shoes
For one day they would view my views
People look down on us, they say we fight just for a color
but me and my homeboys would die for one another
We believe in one another, choose loyalty above all laws
Yes we fight, but who's society to tell us what's right?
They lock us away because they feel unsafe
You live your life and we will have ours
You can have expensive cars
Your three-bedroom house, those nice things, all those
diamond rings
Have a "normal life" get a wife
But what happens when you wake up one day, your whole
life is wasted away?
We live life fast, everyday like it's the last
I might die at a young age, or locked in a cage
But it's okay because I chose this life
until the day I die
And then I will finally rest in the sky.

-Wero

From The Beat: Well, what would cause the public to fear gangs? When drive-bys take the lives of innocent children, men, and women, when random robberies and home invasions happen, when homes and businesses are vandalized then of course the public will panic. Do you really want this for your life or is this just a front because you've lost hope in yourself? There's still time for you to change but if this is what you really want then there's nothing anyone can tell you to show you otherwise.

What We Go Through

Of course they would understand a lot more. People could never know until they experience the trouble of a lot of what minorities suffer and probably work a little bit harder than a lot of rich folks.

Most DA's, PO's, and PD's, and even judges come from a poor background but most of the time they really never want to look back to that and that's really important for most people that get judged.

You'll never know, your PO might have been locked up himself. But if the judges be locked up they'll probably have at least a little more sympathy for the younger generation.

If rich people put themselves in poor peoples shoes I guarantee they will learn a lot of what we go through.

-Gordo

From The Beat: Thius is a great piece, Gordo! Do you think that a judges, DA's, PO's background ever affects the decision that he/she makes when deciding whether to send a kid to a placement or the halls?

God Is Judgment

The one and only heavenly Father is showin' me how my life could change. He is telling me if you keep hangin' with the guys I hang with and the things I do with them it will all come back to me.

Right now what he is doing for me is showin' me what will happen and what he did was lock me up in the J-Hall. He is telling me if I keep doing the things I do jail is going to be my life.

So in the hall God is like telling me it's wake up time, you need to realize the decision you make will always have consequences for your actions so in here it's like I am getting a new start.

I'm glad God is in my life, it isn't a waste of time he is believing in me and I pray every night like he said in "Matthew 20:22" whosoever shall ask something in prayers, and believes in me, shall receive it" so I'm thanking him for being in my life, so thank you.

-Junior

From The Beat: Now that you've found your God do you think you're going to live your life any differently? Praying to God will help you spiritually, mentally, and emotionally but remember that God can only do so much for you; the rest you'll have to do yourself.

Denial

What's crackin' Beat, it's Silent. I always used to go home when I was really messed up. I would go and sometimes see my family members there and still went anyway. I would always deny being messed up because I was scared of them calling the cops on me or something.

When I was hella messed up I would stutter and sometimes run up to my room because I was so messed up I'd fall sometimes. And sometimes I was afraid that my bros would see me screwed up and I didn't want them to see me that way because they're small, and they ain't dumb, they'll investigate and probably do drugs, and I don't want that. Well that's basically it.

-Silent

From The Beat: How do you feel about all those messed-up visits home now? Do you feel like you fulfilled your responsibility to be a role model to your bros? When you were that out of it, what do you think it was that made you want to go home? Do you think that on some level, you wanted your family to catch you—that maybe even though you didn't know it or couldn't admit it, you were asking for their help? What do you think your role models would tell you?

In This Place

The things I feel in here
Are very deep with fear
In the beginning I felt some tears
What is this place?
They're always on my case
Going through this crazy phase getting traced
Based on everyday routine
Couple of staffs are just money fiends
Trying not to think of these things
That pass through my head
Hoping not to be dead
By the time I get out
'Cause I want to be able to see my love
She's always on my thoughts
Going to be tough to get through this
Which is rough
Always making calls
I can't afford to fall
'Cause I'm in Juvenile hall.

-Gordo

From The Beat: Do you think that next time you'll think twice before you do anything that could put you in this positions again?

Lucky Or Unlucky

I consider myself unlucky. Why, because I had a warrant. I was out in the street kicking it in the hood but I thought I would never get caught by the cops.

It was Saturday the 1-24-09 I was at a party and I was high and drunk. While me and the homies were high and drunk we thought we should take a walk around the block, but one of my homies told me we should stay back at the party but I didn't listen.

When we left walking we looked suspicious but we thought no cop would stop us but we were wrong, until we were stopped by a cop.

The cop arrested me and some other homie but now I regret everything because now I'm locked up in here. From being locked up I understand I messed up so much now I'm in here thinking of my son.

-Juan

From The Beat: You want to party, fine but how do you balance partying with raising your son? The time is now to reevaluate your way of living and thinking. It's not just you in this world. Your son deserves a father, a father who will be there.

We Were Playing Handball

What's cracking? Let me start by telling you how I got locked up. We had been playing handball, and we were done, so we were leaving. As we were leaving, we were seven deep. Two cars rolled up and said: you vatos bang? And then we ran. Up and out of nowhere, guns and badges appeared. It was under-cover cops. So, you got stay on your toes and watch what you do so you don't get locked up and taken advantage of. It's your freedom, be careful what you do.

.-S

From The Beat: Yes indeed - be careful what you do. We wonder if you've told us the whole story of that episode. Playing handball isn't a crime. There must be more to this story. Perhaps you'll write the second chapter for us.

Denial

There was a time when I was confronted. I was confronted by my parents about me stealing cars. They asked me why I did it and I said for the money.

It's funny 'cause I have a job and I still go out late at night and do it. They told me some things that made me want to stop but I don't think I can cause I get too much money for doing it.

-Tony

From The Beat: You have a job and you still steal for cash, Tony? Greed can only get you so far. There's more to life than money, Tony, we hope that you can realize that.

Difficult Challenge

One of the more difficult challenges for me is right now. Being locked up is hard. Being away from my mom and girlfriend is hard.

I feel like I owe them four months. I hate the fact that I make my girlfriend cry every night. I just wanna be with her, and see her beautiful smile, and feel her touch. I want to make her feel good in all ways possible. It kills me inside that I can't talk to my girlfriend. I wish I could just hear her voice. When I get out I'm gonna be there for her, for what ever she needs. I'm gonna be there for my mom, too.

-D

From The Beat: Start by being there for yourself. To paraphrase one of Mr. Shakespeare's characters: To your own self be true. Then you won't be false to anyone.

"Sacrifice"

What's crackin'? It's Playboy. Sacrificing for my future?

Well I'll sacrifice the system to live a better life. I'm talking about that gangster life. I can have a better life then that.

I'll sacrifice the drugs so I don't be out there doing things I ain't suppose to be doing. What I mean is that I ain't trying to be up in here. I rather chill out there with my brothers and hyna.

To do better in life you're always going to have to sacrifice something or someone. But it's whatever because this playboy can't change.

We all made choices and I made one too and that was to be a gangster that's something I would never sacrifice. Much love...

-Playboy

From The Beat: You started off by saying you're going to sacrifice drugs but then you say you won't sacrifice your gangster life??? Won't the gangster lifestyle bring you to the halls then prison eventually? Wouldn't it be better to live your life without constantly watching your back?

My Most Difficult Challenge

Hey Beat, I'm a talk about my most difficult challenge.

I think my most difficult challenge is being locked up because I'm not used to just being behind walls 24 hours a day. Especially when I can't see my family or my girlfriend everyday like I used to.

I just try to make everyday go by as fast as possible, and then when I get out I can just look back and say I made it and continue living my life with a positive attitude.

-Brandon

From The Beat: Being locked up is never fun, Brandon. You can at least take away this experience with you to help you stay away from the people/places that could land you back in that cell.

Sacrifice A Lot

What's good Beat? Well, the topic is what I have been thinking about.

I am going to have to sacrifice a lot, not because I have to, because I want to. I am going to have to change my attitude and the way I think, start living the good life.

I know my family has made a lot of sacrifices for me. So I want to make my mom proud by being somebody, go to college, and graduate, have a family and hopefully, one day, help my mom out a lot for all the bad things I have put her through such as court dates, etc...

That's what I would sacrifice for my family. Thanks Beat.

-John

From The Beat: Sounds like you have a plan! What will you do to make sure that you go through with this plan?

One Step at a Time

There was one thing in life that I used to love more than life itself. It was money.

If it wasn't money it wasn't me. Money, weed, and drank was my life. I really did not care for drugs, but now life itself is an everyday hustle to strive in life so that's about it.

I'm going to leave you with this," Everyday is a new day to plot on your future to be successful, it's about that time."

-Shine

From The Beat: That's a great quote, now, how do you apply it to your life?

Complainant

What's crackin' Beat/ Beat reader? How you been? Hopefully good and staying strong, to the people facing life skills to the homeboys facing life. As for me, I'm doing good. Fighting negative emotions.

Well, I got a complaint. Lasts Thursday, I was reading the 14.10 issue, and I was reading a sick-ass poem. It was familiar... Well, it was mine! Some guy named "N" (he knows who he is) from Santa Clara called it "Empty" but I wrote that shhh like eight months ago. It was called, "Click! Click! Click!" that guy was straight jocking.

Quit copying my shhh! Be original with your own thing. Ha ha, thanks for jocking my skills!

To al the homeboys, stay up. To al good-looking females here, stay sexy — no disrespect to the homeboys that got girls in here. Much amor.

-Cisco

From The Beat: We're sorry we let someone plagiarize your poem! That's really shady. A couple of hundred years ago, the author Charles Caleb Colton wrote, "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." So, consider yourself flattered!

Thinkin' About You

Intro,:

Toony: So many thoughts about you, girl. I only got one question... Why?

Peanutt: A hundred rounds, straight up. You know we're meant to be. One love, one life, one struggle.

Bridge

Toony: I've been thinkin' about you, Baby

Peanutt: I've been thinkin' about you, Baby

Yeah, you got me goin' crazy

Toony: You got me goin' crazy...

Peanutt: I got you all up in my mind

Thinkin' about you all the time

Toony: Thinkin' about you, Baby...

Verse 1:

Peanutt: I've been thinkin' about you, dreaming about you

Got me goin' crazy

All the memories we created will always stay with

me

Locked down for future years, I'm continuing to love you endlessly

Stand by my side, promises will be faithfully

No more broken hearts. I'll fulfill al your fantasies

I love you, Baby, no girl could do the things you do for me

Our love is meant to be

I changed my player ways so we could be for eternity
These circumstances that's present, they only part time for me

When we back in each other' lives, nothing's goin' to take me from you, you from me

Promise, promise, promise, picturing the future pans of our lives so clearly

Having young ones, being the best parents we could be

That day will soon come when you're right next to me

Completing each other's hearts

So hold on tight and be down for P.E.A.N.U.T.T.

Don't worry, you won't regret anything you do for me

Chorus:

Baby, Baby, you make me smile...

You've been on my mind for quite a while...

I'm just sittin' here, I'm s alone...

It won't take long, I'm comin' home... Baby

Verse 2:

Toony: Our lives weren't the best but we can make them better

Through any type of situation and through any type of

Weather

But whether if it's our problems we're facin'

together

Or when I'm locked away and when you writin' me letters

Since I've been gone, I've been think' about us holdin' hands

Walkin' down the lane to exchange them golden bands

And understand I ain't perfect as a loving man

But please believe me when I say I'm doin' all that I can

I remember how at night you used to cry to me

And when I wasn't by your side, you used to cry to sleep

I know you wake up in the mornin' cryin' under the sheets

You're gettin' ready to let go so please stop cryin' for me

No matter where I'm taken, I will never feel right

So every night just hold on tight and wipe them tears from your eyes

You've been runnin' through my mind and that's the reason for this song

Baby, I was wrong, but now I'm gone, and for how long?

Chorus:

Baby, Baby, you make me smile...

You've been on my mind for quite a while...

I'm just sittin' here, I'm so alone...

It won't take long, I'm comin' home... Baby

-Toony and Peanutt

From The Beat: If we gave pieces of the week to love poems (which we don't), this would get one. It's a beautiful song tinged with the sadness of knowing where it was written...

Lucky Or Unlucky

I don't think there are such things as lucky or unlucky. I think everything happens for a reason and when people always say 'oh I'm unlucky' but then again they put their selves in messed up positions.

But what I'm saying is I think everything happens for a reason. Every time things used to happen and I used to think damn I'm hella lucky but now that I look at it I don't think I was ever unlucky or lucky it just happened and now I'm using everything I know to better myself.

I do believe there is a devil and God, so I think that matters a lot and what's really in the inside.

-Miranda

From The Beat: So do you believe in fate? Do you think fate played a part in your hall time? When you get out will you try to change yourself or will you wait for fate to take place?

Hurting Not Yourself But Family Too...

Hey Beat, this Nikko. I want to talk about things that been hard for me is being locked up because it's not just hurting me, it's hurting my mom and my family. It sucks every time I go to court and I don't get released, she cries and always has to go to the hospital, and that make me cry to 'cause I'm sad that she might die and I love her to death.

I gotta go so to all people who locked up stay out 'cause you not just hurting yourself you hurting your friends and family too.

-Nikko

From The Beat: We're sorry for the pain that your being locked up has caused you and your family both, but we know that your mom would be proud of the perspective and empathy you show in this piece. When you do get out, what do you plan to do to rebuild your relationship with your mom and your family?

The Dumbest Thing

What's up Beat. I'm just dropping some lines on today's topic, which is: the dumbest thing I ever did. Well, where do I start? The dumbest thing I've done was rob some old dude. I felt kind of bad about it because he was some old innocent white guy.

-Remorseful robber

From The Beat: That was not only dumb. It was unkind and cowardly. But you seem to realize that. We hope you don't forget it. Next time, imagine that it's your own grandpa. How would you feel if someone jacked your gramps?

My Most Difficult Challenge

Q-vole Beat, this is Lil' Spooky and today I'm gonna write about my most difficult challenge. It's to stop smoking crystal meth.

Well, I started to smoke since I was in the 7th grade and ever since it's been hard to quit. I've tried so bad to stop but I always end up smoking that crystal meth.

In order to keep me going I go steal cars for that drug. But hopefully this drug program will help me stop for good because I don't want to come back or end up doing something dumb for the drug.

-Lil Spooky

From The Beat: Meth is no joke and can mess you up, as you know. If you really want to quit you'll have to do more than stick to your program, you'll have to change your whole lifestyle. We wish you the best, and hope that you can find it in you to quit. Life is too precious for you to waste away.

Sacrificing For My Future

What's up, Beat? Well, you want to know what I have to change to change my future? A lot.

First of all, I gotta change going out and doing all of that. That goes with partying because I got a baby boy on the way and I can't be doing all that crazy stuff that will get me in trouble.

I also got to change the way I think and just make smarter decisions because look where I'm at now...just for making dumb choices.

I regret it now because I'm probably gonna be in here when I have my baby and that's what brings me down everyday. I don't wanna miss any part of his life even though I know he will be in good hands until I get out.

That's the stuff I have to sacrifice to change my life.

-Marlene

From The Beat: Right now it might be difficult but you have to be strong and keep your head up. Once you're out then you're out and then all you'll have to work on is staying out of the halls. We wish you the best, Marlene, and hope that everything goes all right for you and your son.

Hall Is Pain

Damn mija, as I sit in these four walls,
It seems to me like I am in hell
And I can only see that sky
Where a beautiful cloud has formed your face,
Through the window.
Every time I close my eyes and I think of you
Then I make my own dream
When that happens I get so happy.
But when my dream is over
I just remember that it's two months
That I need to wait with this pain.

-Largo

From The Beat: Nice poem! You've really painted a picture in our minds of a place we would not want to return to.

My Most Difficult Challenge

My most difficult challenge is staying out of jail.

For example, the last time I was out I was doing good, going to my programs.

Then I get the call from my homeboy. He said, "Come post up, homeboy", I said forget it. Just lasted one week of house arrest. Back in here.

Next time just gotta be smart.

-Lil' Bird

From The Beat: What'll be different when you get out this time? If the homeboys call and ask you to kick it, will you answer the call or will you stay on track? It's time to start making the right choices for you and not following what the homeboys do.

Saying No

I remember when I had to swallow my pride. Once, I almost went along with my bro, messy, when he wanted to go on a robbery. We wanted to do it so we can come up and have some money. He really wanted to, but I told him, "no, let's stay home." I didn't want to say no, because we are best friends.

Although I said no, it hurt to say so. When he went ahead with the robbery and ended up getting caught by the cops.

-Baby P

From The Beat: Well, sometimes, a person's pride gets him/her into trouble, and yet other times, pride is what is needed to help a person speak up and represent their cause! I think in this case, you decided to use your good judgment above all else.

No Such Thing as Luck

Really, I don't think that anybody, anybody, should feel lucky or unlucky because it's not that God chose you to be unlucky or lucky, it's where you decide to take your path that decides what will find, or see.

It doesn't matter who you are. My sister found a 100-dollar bill once, after that she has never found anything. I found a dollar, but it was ripped in half.

So there's no such thing as being lucky or unlucky. Peace out, and you'll see.

-Lil' Darky

From The Beat: Do you think that there are kids in J-Hall who are locked up because of their luck or because of the choices they've made? Do you think that luck played a part in your hall time?

Can The Rich Put Themselves in The Shoes of The Poor?

Well to me, I think if a judge and PO just for a moment, be in our shoes and realize who we are. Like yeah, we do make bad choices but we all do.

If the judges and the PO's can put us away so fast then why not give them a chance to step in our shoes and see what we all been through?

Like some of us have no parents or have to be in one room with you kids and sometimes you can't afford to eat all the time and work hard for nothing 'cause you have to support others then yourself.

Just things like that 'cause I know our PO's and judges don't go through what we go through everyday. Especially when we have to watch our back.

-Guera

From The Beat: There are actually some PO's, judges, and DAs who went through the same experiences that many of you have went/going through. Just because they had a not so easy life they still found a way to make it better. Do you think you'll find your way?

To Give It Up

To give it all up I'd go back to when I was young as a baby and couldn't walk.

If I were to give it all up. I'd give up this place, time and all that I've been through.

If I were to give it all up. I'd give it up for the 'cause of good, if I was to give up everything rite now.

But I know it really won't happen physically but only in my mind. The only way I were to give up everything is only if I go back to when I was a baby.

But I really don't know if I were to give up everything I've been through, I got a lot of good supportive family member by my side and also a lot of homies too.

But to tell you the truth we've all only got one life to live and for that reason I am going to live my life to the fullest the best way I can and live it with no regrets.

-Looking Back

From The Beat: Do you think you can live your life to the fullest without living it like this? We hope that you realize now, before it's too late, that your life is worth more than you're making it.

Challenges

What's cracking, Beat? As for me just here keeping this mind of mine solid. Well, I'm gonna touch on today's topic "My most difficult challenge."

I believe my most difficult challenge is staying out of the hall. The longest that I've ever been out from this place is three months. I've already been here seven times. I plan on making it the last though.

The reasons I believe that I keep repeating this cycle is because I go back to the same things I did before to get me here. Also, it's cause some of the peers I chill with, I make poor choices when I'm around them.

But when I'm out I am moving to New Mexico. So getting away from all the things that I always go back to I believe will help me a lot. I'm gonna go out there, get off probation, and graduate school, and then come back to my city.

From here I don't know what else I'ma do. Just get a job and post up. Well, that's it for today so till next time I'm gone.

-Benji

From The Beat: It's hard to stay out of the hall when you have all the distractions on the outs and that's when you're faced with another challenge. Do you go back to your old ways or do you stay away from the people and places that could bring you back to the hall?

Which is Easier, Freedom Or Incarceration?

I feel it goes both ways. It's easy in here and on the outs. It's also hard in here and hard on the outs. While you are locked up, it's hard emotionally, but easy, physically. It's emotionally hard in here because you're under a lot of stress—you are forced with time and you are held away from the ones you love.

You are also stuck in a little room all day. It's easy physically because everything is handed to you all you have to do is behave. It's easy on the outs because you got a lot of support from people and you can be how you want to be. It's hard because you got to work and make your own money to support yourself if your parents don't help you.

-James

From The Beat: We appreciate the thought and detail you've put into teaching us, from your perspective, what the challenges are on the outs and on the inside. As with many moments in life there are positive aspects and negative aspects. Hopefully, that fact keeps us from feeling too down during hard times.

Guns And Roses

Nowadays, young teenagers own guns for protection? But for what reasons? For the safety of their lives? Or just to own one just to look cool?

Now that most teenagers are getting guns more lives are being taken away by gun violence. Lives are being taken away from innocent young lives. With losses from the families they have no choice to say goodbye to the loved one that passed away and leave a rose for the innocent.

-Mikeyo

From The Beat: Why do you think some of your peers think it's "cool" to own a gun? Is it the power? What do you think we should do, as a community, to change this factor?

Outs or Locked Up

I think it's a little of both. When on the outs, you don't have to be around people that you don't want to but also at the same time, in here, you don't have to worry about your enemies trying to shoot you when you are not expecting it. But, that is not to say there not a lot of danger in here...think about it.

You are putting some of the most dangerous people on the streets and putting them in a small place and hoping that nothing happens. You are putting enemies who, on the outs, would kill each other, next door to each other. On the outs, it's easy to stay outta trouble but once you are in trouble, there no escaping it while you are on the outs. Unlike in here, it's harder to start trouble but easier to get out of it because no one wants to mess things up for themselves before court.

-Ryan

From The Beat: Your point about putting the most dangerous people in an enclosed space and hoping no disaster will happen is interesting. We'd like to look at the same point with a different perspective...all the folks locked up also have some important things in common, what do you think?

Time For a Change

I once use this (drugs) 'til I started seeing how it changed my relationship with my family and my friend and street bro's.

I'm tired of the pain I have put them through, I've lost a lot of good friends that care for me from doing these drugs everyday.

I had to have these drugs, when I didn't have it I'd be out on the streets doing dirt so I can make some money just to have it but now I'm leaving it all behind.

It's time for a change.

-Chris

From The Beat: It's hard to say no when you have an addiction. It'll be hard to kick the habit but if you really want to and do everything you can to quit drugs then we know you can make it.

Future

To me, I think I got to give up everyone, except my family, to make my future better. I learned that nobody ain't going down for you but your family. You can't trust no one in this life and that's real talk.

I also need to give up fighting 'cause all it do is get me in trouble. Look at me now facing dumb ass time.

But to all, give the stupid shhh up so you wont end up doing dumb ass time.

-Faith

From The Beat: This is great advice, but why do you think it took you until now to want to change?

That Boy

There was a good time.
 There was a bad time.
 Well, you come up
 And your best friend drops a dime,
 Damn, and you thought it was your time to shine.
 The good time was once,
 Your bad time came now,
 Your trading trays pushing weight.
 There was once a time
 When you drank out of the same forty with your boy,
 Doing dirt, watching each other's back.
 Well, you sold the sack.
 Something changed overnight
 You wonder if it was jealousy, or hate,
 You think why did he do what he did,
 After a few months you wonder what he truly did.
 Time flies so it's all right
 Drop the drama and get your life straight
 Kick your boy to the curb
 'Cause he ain't ever gonna be straight.
 None of the homies hate,
 Post up with your girl,
 That never thought of ever doing you dirty,
 'Cause if they do
 You know who to send them too.

-Tino

From The Beat: Did someone close to you inspire you to write this raw poem? All we can say is we'd love to read more of your work. You are truly talented!

A Day In My Life

My life is filled with booze and dank.
 Sometimes my lady fiends for crank
 These days are old but full of fun
 Until the sun comes up to dawn
 My life is going down the drain
 Come on, homey, let's find some fame,
 Come on, make the girl yell our name
 'Cause I have no shame
 These games are fun but don't get hurt
 Whenever I wanna freakin' flirt
 Just remember who to choose
 'Cause in this game I never lose,
 To all stay up
 Be slick on yo' shhh...
 So you don't end up in this joint.

-Ty

From The Beat: How does one lose in the game? Wouldn't you say that being in the hall is losing? This life may be fun and games now but later on down the line where can this life bring you?

A Story About Running

Let me tell you a story about running. Every time I try to run away from problems, such as a relationship, probation, and family-- any kind of problems, I always end up under the influence and committing crimes. Then, I end up in here, locked up.

I realize that every time I do that, all it would do is bring more pain and frustration to myself, and everyone I try to run away from.

-Taz

From The Beat: May we kindly ask...what is it about facing problems that seem to intimidate you to the point that you don't want to be sober? We are also realizing from your piece that you have given in and decided getting drunk and getting in trouble is a good substitute for trying to face your problems or work out conflicts with those you love.

Election '08

To tell you the truth, I never thought we would ever have an African-American president. It feels pretty cool to be apart of history. I can tell my kids that I was here when the first black president was elected.

In Obama's speeches, he talks about all the good things he's going do for the country. To me, I think he's going do very well as president and get America back on its feet. I feel that this change is for the better.

-Dave

From The Beat: Yes indeed, when you put it like that, you will definitely have something to tell your children about it, even your grandchildren! We all hope the best for Obama's term. Let's all stay tuned and keep supporting our new president so that he can accomplish putting the country back on its feet.

Challenges

People are faced with challenges everyday, big ones, small ones; you're bound to come across one sooner or later. A challenge can mean differently to different people.

For me, a real challenge is something that comes across you and would make you stop and think. For me being in juvenile hall is a real challenge. Being in the hall is hard because you are away from your love one. And that is not the worst part.

When you start thinking about your loved ones and how much you miss them, you start thinking why you miss them, and you miss them because you are stuck in here, in juvenile hall. And being in the hall makes you wonder why you're here. Which is a slap back to reality.

When you are in the hall it means that you have done something wrong. And admitting you were wrong is the hardest challenge in life. Which makes the hall a hard challenge to cross because being in here makes you wrong in life.

-Woodie

From The Beat: If this is the wrong life then how do you live the "right" life, Woodie? What will you do for yourself to live your life differently, on the outs and not in the hall?

Respect

At times, it takes swallowing a little bit of pride. Dang, it just happened right now that I was thinking about what was irritating me, even though the comment wasn't directed towards me...like we are the kind of people that have no emotions. Trust, even the hardest, most cold-hearted folks in the world, deep down, maybe even deeper than normal, that a person has feelings. Even though at the end of the day, you want to beat someone up who sits behind that desk, you'll have to respect him/her.

It is not because they have a badge, or they look intimidating, but for the fact that those people that come here, whether their intentions are good or bad, whether they are big and muscular, or as small and skinny...they have all accomplished something. They have earned what they worked for and even though you might hate that person, you have to respect them.

To all, stay strong in the mind, body, and soul. Take care of yourselves and your loved ones. Even though you are here, right now, it doesn't mean you can't be grateful and learn from this experience.

-Eagle

From The Beat: We really like this free write, stream of consciousness writing. We hope that you do more of this kind of writing. This practice can lead to a great short story or a good book, better yet, a free mind and a better understanding of you!

My Change In Life

The most difficult challenge I did here in the hall. The difficult challenge I ever got was my first time I came in the hall because I didn't know what to do. I was really scared of being here, but then when prisoners from here from the hall help me process the steps I had to do, to do good.

One of the challenges that I could hope to overcome next would be if I could get released because I want to be home. Yes, this is one of the worst challenges I ever faced in my life because I feel like am stuck in some thick white walls.

One other thing that was going on in my life and made it so hard was every time I'd be with my friend and they do stupid stuff. During my difficult time, my parents helped me a lot to process my problems because they showed how much they care about me. That you should never listen to your friends because they ain't real friends in life.

-Alejandro

From The Beat: Maybe the best thing for you to do, once you're released, is to separate yourself from the people who influence you in the wrong way? What do you think you need to do to keep yourself going straight?

What's Easier?

Well, what's easier? Life inside or out? To me, life on the inside is easier because you get every thing you need in here—your clothes, food, and you really don't have to do much. But, once you are out, you have to work for food and everything else.

Not everyone has a place to stay or have a roof over his/her head. But in here, you'll always have a roof over your head. I really doing have much more to say so all doing real time, stay strong and keep your heads up.

-Rascal

From The Beat: Your piece is reminding us of something that Americans don't like to admit. We live in one of the richest country in the world and our child poverty rate is as high as Third World countries. When you talk about how being the hall provides for your basic needs when on the outs, you may not have that, we want to say we understand the difficulty you face at such a young age. We hope that you will also utilize the hall's education to help you get a head start to live a life that meets basic needs.

The Dumbest Thing Was Hitting The Pipa

Que onda, this is Pelon. Well, the dumbest thing that I have done is hit the glass pipa.

I think this is the dumbest decision I have made because it is really hard to stop. The first time I hit it I didn't want to hit it, but the homey didn't want to hit it by himself so I hit it too.

It felt hella firme the first time I hit the pipa. I stayed sitting down on a couch for about three or four hours straight without doing nothing, it felt hella cool just sitting down.

Now, I have been hitting the pipa every time I see it. It really messed me up, I got hella flaco and I wasn't healthy.

Well, now I am going to try and stop hitting the pipa because I realized that it really was messing me up so I'm through with that. To all in the hall, keep your head up.

-Pelon

From The Beat: Being in the hall will help you stop but once you're on the outs you'll have to make your choice to either stay away from the pipe or go back to it. We hope that when that time comes you can step it up and walk away from it. Maybe you can get yourself into a program? Address your illness!

What Do I Regret?

What's up world? Well, y'all already know, I'm fresh off of the restructure program. Y'all always asking me what I regret, so here it is. I don't regret robbing, stealing, selling drugs, or hurting. I only do what I got to do to survive. I do regret some of the things that I did or forgot to say to my loved ones.

Ever since I saw my homie get laid out with his eyes closed, I became, "cold blooded." Growing up in the hood, you give a ninja an inch, and he'll take a whole mile from you.

I feel like I have a devil on one side and an angel on the other. The devil is everything that I've seen and experienced—things that made me rob, steal, and hurt.

The angel is my mama. She would tell me to slow down, 'cause she doesn't want to see me back in jail or in the casket. But, what is worse, waking up in the pen or sleeping up under the dirt?

Oh, and I do regret some of my tats. Now I wanna get something else tatted there instead.

-Reaper

From The Beat: Why do you NEED to hurt others to survive? We hope you can write more about that, as you work towards recovery.

What I've Came Down To Realize

What's up, Beat? This is your boy Frank again coming at you guys from this unit, and I was not feeling any of these topics they got for us so I'm gone let you all on real shhh.

What I've came down to realize in the long run is how this world works and how people get down nowadays and these choices everyone makes day after day and where they take you in life. So for me it's like I'm sitting in this hall from day up to day night and the choices I've been making in here.

Well, I'm waiting to get sentence and these choices I've been making is some good choices, but these choices ain't just for me. They're also for my loved ones out there thinking about me everyday of the time.

So, what I've came down to realize in the long run is that I need to handle my priorities and get my shhh together, 'cause I'm gonna bring a little girl into this world pretty soon and I really want to be a good dad to her, and also for my mom 'cause I'm tired of seeing her shed tears when she visit me and do it also for myself because this is getting pretty old and I'm ready to get my act together and handle my priorities. Not as a little boy but as a man and face up to my responsibilities and stop running from my problems and just take what I got coming to me as a man and leave it as that and better myself from my mistakes that I've made down the line of my 16 years on earth and better myself and not look at the cup half empty and start looking at it all the way full for myself and for three very important women in my life and these women are my baby mama, and my moms, and baby sister.

So, this what I've came down to realize in the long run. So everyone that see where I be coming from that's cool and if you hating I aint tripping more power to you.

-Frank

From The Beat: We wish you the best and hope that you can follow through with your plans. It'll be hard, especially in the beginning, so what do you think you could do to make the change a little easier for yourself and your family?

The Pipa Is The Dumbest Thing I Ever Did

Well, the dumbest thing I ever did was when I was 15 years old I was kicking back with some homeys, drinking and smoking.

There was some homeys going to the room, and I ask one of them what were they doing so he told me if I wanted to go in. When I went in there they were hitting the pipa (pipe). I was so drunk that I wanted to do it. I thought it was cool and since that day I wanted to do it everyday.

Hopefully, when I get out I can stop using meth, 'cause I think it really messed me up and that's one of the reasons I'm locked up 'cause when you're high on meth you really don't care about what you do. Well that's it for today.

-Creeper

From The Beat: If you really want to stop then you'll have to either change your life and friends or you can learn to say no. If the homies ask you to hit the pipe then you can follow or you can be your own man and say no. We know you can do it, but it will take work, maybe drug rehab is the first step? Get help!

Mama Was Doped Out, Pt. 2

Since I was mainly left alone
with little childhood guidance
Older homies took me in
and the streets were united
Introduced to the gangs,
introduced to the drugs
Doing G thangs
because I rolled with the thugs
Growing up so fast
but I was oh so young
When I tell about the past
some people say that I was dumb
But what else could I have done
being in my situation
After all I'm just one of God's creations
And I thank Him I had family
that was always there for me
'Cause they're the ones who broke the thoughts
I had
nobody cared for me
All through elementary life was so hard
So it left me emotionally and mentally scarred
Deep, deep inside these stories
always had to hide
'Cause I knew I would express it
when I felt that it was time
But before the next rhyme
and if I ever tell the rest of it
If you're in a hard time, make the best of it.

-Yaya

From The Beat: Thank you for sharing this piece with us. Do you ever find yourself wishing that you could go back and somehow change your childhood? We hope to read more of your pieces from you, they're so inspiring and we know that many kids will be able to relate.

I Wouldn't Change

If I could give it all up I wouldn't because I love what I do and I love this life. I know some people get sick of being locked up but I really don't mind it.

Some guys say when they get out they're not coming back and that they're not going to do what they used to do, that they're gonna change but when I get out I'm probably gonna go back to doing what I used to do. So if I could start from scratch I wouldn't change shhh.

-Gabriel

From The Beat: It sounds like you've already decided your future. Do you think you would ever try changing?

My Life

I don't like the topic for today so I'm gonna talk about me and my life. Hey, I'm a 15-year-old boy with a little boy on the outs. Before my son was a month-old I got locked up and that made me feel like messed up and like shhh.

Right now, I just wish I would go home to him and his mom and my mom because there's nothing more that I love than my family. I wanted my son so badly and yet now that I have him I can't even be there to support him.

Now that I've been locked up, it has given me time to think about every thing that I can do for him. Once I get out I told him that I will not come back and I will be there to give him what I never had.

To all those out there with kids or going to have a kid don't get locked up because not seeing your kid grow up is not a good feeling. Once I get out I am going to go to rehabilitation so I can be better than my parents ever were to me.

I know that I wouldn't be able to go on with life if my son wasn't there with me. I love my son, mom, and girlfriend more than everything.

Well got to go so later and to all with kids or pregnant girlfriends stay up and don't get locked up. Later stay up and love life and your family the way you want to be loved.

To my girl I love you baby, and you Joseph Junior see you when I'm out. Muah, baby, kisses to my family and my son.

-Baby Boy

From The Beat: Wow, you've been through a lot in your fifteen years here! First we'd like to congratulate you on the birth of your son and on your ability to grow up so fast and realize what you need to do for him. Try, try, try to finish school (and your girlfriend too) because that is the key to giving your son a better life. We know that it will be hard but reading this letter we know that you can do it. Believe in yourself, because you are not alone anymore, your son is depending on you.

When Everything Was Free

When I get out I will have to get things on my own, work for it instead of taking things from other people. Before I got locked up it was an everyday thing to take stuff without permission. In my eyes everything was free but if I continue to see everything that way I will have a hard time staying out the hall.

I will keep myself busy by filling out job applications. I won't be able to go nowhere when I get out 'cause I'm going to be on house arrest.

When I'm done with that I'm going to stay out of trouble.

-B

From The Beat: Whenever you get the temptation to steal, Black, think of your stay in the hall, was it worth it, is it worth it to go back? We know that you can make the right choice you just have to think first!

Give It All Up

If I gave up all my bad habits I would have a lot to gain from it. Such as if I gave up drugs and making the wrong choices it would benefit me a lot.

Drugs damage the body and mind. I have done a lot of ecstasy and it's made my memory cells bad so I can't remember a lot of things. If I gave up wrong choices I probably wouldn't be here and such.

I am willing to give those up to make my life better it's not worth it, it's hard to see my family worry and cry that I am stuck in juvi.

-Vtec

From The Beat: It's hard to quit the things we've been doing for so long, but you can do it. It might seem impossible but if you stick through the bad times and stay focused then we know you can pull through!

Hotgirlz Earn No Love

The dumbest thing that I ever did was to get locked up. I would rather not explain why I am locked up, but I have a misdemeanor. I feel that the juvenile hall is not the place to be. This is my first time in here and I do not like it. I don't like the way that staff treats us. I understand that they have the higher hand, but I also know as well as they do that to get respect you have to give respect. I don't like the schedule because they get us up early, and half of our time is spent in the cell. I have been here for one week now and I haven't eaten any of the meals, or drank any of the recycled water. I do drink the milk and eat the cookies though. I don't think that this is the place for me and I am never coming back.

-Alvaneisha

From The Beat: Being in the Hall is not a vacation. It's not supposed to be fun. Fun is something you have when you have freedom. But having freedom comes with the price of following society's laws. Break the laws, lose your freedom, go to juvenile hall. The only person that can change this routine is you!

Being Locked Up

One of the most difficult challenges I have had to face is actually being locked up here in JJC.

You tell me how it feels to turn 18 in juvi.

But you know what?

I keep my head up to the sky.

It's like I'm getting high off life.

Day by day, I keep myself busy.

It's hard but nobody said it was going to be easy.

I can't wait until I get out.

I'm going to do good because that's what I'm about.

I'm not a little kid anymore.

I know what's right and what's wrong.

All I want is to do good in my life

So my family and kids can say "I'm proud of that guy."

Until the day I get out I pray at night and I know that day is coming around.

-Jesus

From The Beat: We hope you are granted that second chance very soon, and we hope you carry this new positive outlook with you into the future.

A Dangerous Night

The most difficult thing I have faced happened on this one day. It started with me and the boy. We went out late to get a g-ride.

While we were trying to get into the ride, we heard shots. So we ran to the street and saw two suspects with SKS guns. They got done shooting my brother's house and they saw me and the boy.

They stopped and ran toward our way. I started backing up and they finally came in front of us. They started disrespecting and the boy started bangin' on them. They started letting off shots and I ducked and ran for my life. I saw a group of girls so I said to them "run".

They started yelling and I got to safety. I met up with my boy and we were okay. We ran to some girls house and posted for safety.

The next day I heard that one of the girls had gotten shot. From that day on, I don't stay out too late. I have learned a lot from that and thank God for not taking my life. Amen.

-Lil' Lophy

From The Beat: You were very lucky to survive that night. Hopefully you are never put in that situation again. Life is so precious and it only takes one crazy night for your life to disappear.

Feeling Clean

Denial happens a lot, especially when you're under the influence of drugs. Drugs can change your thought process, meaning it changes the way you think. When I used to smoke, I used to be in denial a lot.

For example, when I used to go home high I would lie to my mom when she asked me if I had been smoking that day, and I would lie to her face and tell her "no" knowing damn well I was high but I would still say something like, "no, I'm not high" but that I was around my friends while they were smoking. I feel stupid to this day because of being in denial.

The only reason why I feel that way is because I've been clean from drugs for the last two months and my thinking process has cleared. I'm just saying that drugs will change the way you think and denial comes along with it.

-Tayjon

From The Beat: You make a great point, denial and skewed thinking can be the outcomes as a result of drug use. Lying to your mom doesn't help either. We hope you stay on this clean path, and work toward rebuilding that trust with your mom.

Difficult Challenges

My most difficult challenge is that I always want to run the streets and do things that get me in trouble. I listen to fools that I think I love because they say that they love me back. But they really don't. It sucks being in juvenile hall, so for all y'all girls out there banging, and thinking that your gang-banging boyfriend loves you, you are wrong. It is challenge to let them go, but when you are locked up, that is when you think about your family and all of the people that have tried to really help you out. You let them down so that ninjas can have your loyalty. Just remember, Karma will get you too.

-Pierre

From The Beat: It sounds like you have learned a lot in the last year. We have seen a lot of growth in you. Keep your head up high and keep striving to be the best you can.

The Most Difficult Thing

The most difficult thing I ever had to do was to live on my own

When I was twelve years old.

My dad kicked me out because I was smoking cigarettes, Doing drugs and having sex.

My step mom went through my room and found a few things

And my brother snitched me out on the rest of the stuff that I did.

My dad put me out on the streets

But he didn't know that I was pregnant.

I sold drugs and started running with gangs.

I made enough money to get a place to stay until the cops came

And raided my house because the guy I lived with was wanted in Fresno.

I moved out of state and didn't come back until months later.

I moved back with my dad and went bad again within a month.

My parents think that I need them

But they will see that I can make it on my own.

-Bebe G

From The Beat: We think that your parents are trying to show you that making it on your own, at such a young age, can get you mixed up in bad things, and they just want you to thrive. Maybe it's about time that you wanted that for yourself too.

Born In The Game

While I was chillin' in my cell, I thought of this.
 Why these people want to get me,
 When it comes to my dough,
 These females trying to strip,
 I think it's cause they know I'm a real G.
 On the outs,
 I'm known as "the boy neva hesitates to pull a trigga,"
 But unlike some people after, I don't feel bigga.
 Me, I was born in the game,
 So it's what I know and my mind is always set on getting mine,
 And that's something only my real dudes know.
 My life's been nothing but strain and pain,
 But I put out on the streets cause I ain't goin' out in vain.
 Believe what I say cause I say what I mean,
 I will put it down for my team.
 But I can't lie,
 There are times when I wish it were just a dream,
 But then my gangsta reality slaps me hard and mean.
 I know what I do ain't right, but my life just like yours is a fight.
 No matter what I'm gonna put it down right cause that's the game and I keep it tight.
 If I could I would go back in time to before I wanted to bang and slang,
 Maybe I wouldn't be writing this thang.
 But I can't so I endure the strain and pain and remain number one on my grind in the game.

-Devron

From The Beat: This is an insightful piece with a poetic flow. Thanks for putting it down on paper. Being stuck in the game is no easy way to live your life, but we encourage you to keep writing and using your words to fight and survive the craziness of the game.

You Thought

You thought I wouldn't finish high school,
 You thought I wouldn't get a job,
 You thought I wouldn't go home,
 You thought I was going to mess up,
 You thought I was going to mess up,
 You thought I was going back to the streets,
 You thought I was going back to you,
 You thought I wanted you back,
 You thought I would want to see you again,
 You thought that I loved you,
 I will never love you again,
 Because of everything you put me through.
 I hate you forever and forever.
 Quit with your thoughts, that is all that you can do.
 Don't think, just watch.

-Midnight Candy

From The Beat: Sometimes others doubting us can cause to become motivated. Use this motivation to become the best person you can be for yourself.

Doing Dumb Things

The dumbest thing that I ever did was that I robbed a store. It wasn't worth it because I didn't get to keep anything that I stole. I regret it too because I had just got out of here at the beginning of February, and now I am here awaiting another court date.

-Bripsa

From The Beat: The thrill of earning what you want far out ways the fun and ease of taking things you haven't earned.

If I Wasn't Here

I wished I did not miss court. I am going to be in here until Thursday, and then I can go home with my family. I am going to try to never come here again, it is boring. Instead of being here I could be having fun with my family, shopping at the mall, or getting my hair and nails done.

-Porcha

From The Beat: The freedom to do those things comes with the price of staying away from illegal activities, don't forget that when you are on the outs.

Don't Be Dumb

The dumbest thing I ever did was to constantly think that I could lie to my parents and get away with it. Now that I sit back and think about it, all of it was for nothing.

All of the reasons that I am here are because of lying and sneaking around. If I would have just told my mom and just listened to my family none of this would have happened.

Being in here has, and still is teaching me a lot. I am learning to appreciate everything that I have at home, the way that I should.

Juvenile hall is no joke. It is a serious thing, well to me at least. In the short amount of time that I have been in here I have learned my lesson. I am ready to grow up and to be the person that I was meant to be. I am going to go to school and have a better attitude about everything.

-Sunnie

From The Beat: We are glad you are ready to make a change for yourself. Just remember that true change doesn't happen overnight, take it one step at a time and remember to share your inspiration with others who may need encouragement as well. Good luck out there.

I'm A Young Lady, Becoming A Young Woman

I am a young lady becoming a young woman.
 Sometimes it is hard for me to be all I can be
 When you are a 17 year old doing time
 And you want to be free.

My family is the most important thing to me;
 They were on my side when I was running the street.
 I used to not give a care about anything in life;
 All I wanted to do was to be me.

Not having anybody telling me how
 To do anything was the way that I wanted to be.
 I look at all of the people in here struggling to survive,
 And every day it makes me want to cry.

Why does a young lady trying to become
 A young woman has to strive?
 I get lonely at times, and time after time I
 Want to be home even though I know
 I have done the crime.

I ask the Lord, why I have to be in this place,
 Why they took my freedom.
 I want to see my family, but I have to be strong
 Because that's how they would want me to be.
 The only way I can make it is to call on my Lord, God.

-Miss Rice

From The Beat: These are important questions you are asking, they are tough things to go through but all we can tell you is that to honor your family you need to be the best you can be for yourself, that's all that those who love you want from you.

Like A River

The denial that I have of my own life runs deep and long like a river. I say I have complete control of my life but I do not. It feels like I am fighting upstream.

My life is so crazy it's hard to grasp. It seems like every time I try to do right for my family, my hood, and myself things end up getting twisted and I'm right back where I started.

If you say you have control of your life, you're in denial. Don't live in denial.

-Young Bucks

From The Beat: It's tough to control every aspect of our lives, but we do have the power to make the right choices. Don't give up this important fight.

My Visit

I have been locked up for a month and a week now. I haven't seen my dad since then but I saw my mom last week. The last time I talked to my dad was before I got locked up. Tomorrow my mom and dad are going to come visit me. That makes me happy because that means we get an hour to spend together. I get to eat snacks and drink soda, and also talk about what is going on in life or whatever I want to talk about. I'm looking forward to that visit. Hopefully I won't be in here too long.

-D-Tuc

From The Beat: It's so important to keep connected to your family during this difficult time, and you are very lucky to have their support. We hope you enjoy the visit with your parents!

Not Worth It

Don't let drugs take control of your life or else you'll end up in jail or homeless. Drugs ain't worth losing anything. You'll end up losing your family or your life. I'm locked up now. I lost this one girl I really loved to another man. It hurts but it's my fault I let drugs take control, now I learned my lesson, quit while I can stop the drugs. They are not worth losing your loved ones of your life.

-Silvestre

From The Beat: We couldn't have said this better. But it's more inspiring to hear it from someone who has been through it. Thanks for these powerful words.

Illusions

An illusion is something we see but is not really there, like a mirage. The illusion people see in life today is the illusion of fast cash. Dreams of unimaginable wealth and prosperity.

More like fantasies to a poor kid in the slums. Like a bum on a sandwich, or meat to a shark. We thrive on money. Money's like bait and we are the fish. It's easy for a rich kid to say "no, that ain't true."

The reason is that they don't know what it is to want because all their life they had everything handed to them. From their nice houses to their dope rides. They got everything and we got nothing.

Start from the bottom, then work your way up to the top. To some people that's too much work. Rather it be start from the bottom and get to the top. Sometimes that's the only option some people get and that gives them no choice but a life of crime.

-Ray

From The Beat: We give you props for this thoughtful analysis, and we couldn't agree with you more. There are certain socio-economic factors that can separate people. You're an intelligent guy, so keep thinking and writing.

Breaking From Drugs

Being in juvenile hall is not my worse challenge. It's actually helping me with my biggest challenge, drug addiction. I'm in here because drugs got me into trouble with the law. I have never been charged with drug offenses, but the offenses that I did get charged with was because I was on drugs or I needed the money to get drugs.

It first started off by smoking a little weed in the sixth grade, here and there. I was probably the only kid I knew that was smoking weed until the eighth grade. I started smoking more frequently in the eighth grade after I met a few other stoners. At the end of the eighth grade, I met a girl that didn't like the fact that I smoked, so I quit.

Then one of my friends told me about "KJ" which at the time I didn't know was elephant tranquilizer. He told me it wasn't as bad as weed, so I smoked two joints of it and all I remember was having a constant adrenaline rush and wanting to fight my best friend cause my mind was telling me he was talking crap. He wasn't. Good thing it never escalated.

Throughout the years I stayed with that girl, on and off, and I would smoke weed and drink. Then when I hit 15, I tried meth and got hooked for about five months. The reason I felt it was alright to do was because my love for that girl nearly drove me insane. I got locked up and thankfully got out and quit, but not for good. I relapsed one time and didn't do it for about a year after that.

During that year, I experimented with other drugs. I think drugs comfort me because I have a chemical imbalance in my brain, which is caused by my ADHD. Throughout those years, I caused my mom just about every emotional pain that there is. It kills me to this day and my mom is still hurting.

-Ijg

From The Beat: Thank you for sharing this powerful story of your experience with drugs. It teaches us that drug addiction not only hurts ourselves, but it hurts the people we love as well. It also seems like you've had a longstanding battle with drugs, ever since the sixth grade. What advice do you have for others who are going the same thing?

Most Difficult Challenge

Well, I think being in here is the worst challenge I have ever faced. It's a good experience because it opened my eyes in so many ways. It has made me think about where I want to be in five years. I know that I don't want to be in here. I know I don't want to be in prison. It's hard being away from my family, not being able to talk to them whenever I want to. The girls in the Hall though, make it not so bad to be here. I will be home soon and make sure that I never come back here again.

-Blanca

From The Beat: That's good that you think ahead, but to get there you have to make steps today. So what will you do first?

My Mistake

The dumbest thing I ever did was come here to juvenile hall. You miss your family everyday and you can't go to school to see your friends. The most painful part is you miss someone you love the most and you let that person down. Your family always remembers what you did to them and that hurts the most. My experience of coming here was not fun. So if I were you, don't ever come here and stay in school. Stay with your family and do good in school.

-Jack

From The Beat: So many things change when you get locked, and we thank you for sharing your advice with others.

I Remember When

I remember when I was young
 You used to tell me,
 I was just like you.
 I remember when you told me
 I could be anything I wanted to be.
 I remember how you were the only one
 That I used to look up to.
 But I still remember the day
 That you went missing.
 I couldn't think at night,
 Just thinking about how you were doing
 And wondering where you were at.
 No matter how scared I was,
 I can't deny that I was scared for you.
 I wanted you home as soon as possible,
 I wanted you with me,
 Telling me how much you loved me
 And that I mean the world to you.
 So all you left me with
 Was my childhood memories.
 Remembering everything
 That you once told me.
 But now I know though,
 That you are in a better place.
 Because life was rough
 And it was your time to go.
 So I hope to see you again someday,
 Because you are my mother.
 And I will always love you.

-Veronica

From The Beat: We are sorry to hear about your loss. It is always a difficult thing to lose a parent or a child. All we can advise you of is to use this experience to be there for others that will need you in the future, and to be the best person you can for yourself, so that you can thrive in the life you have ahead of you.

Madness

This week was a hard week, not cause of doing time but cause the staff are always making me mad. It's all cause of me doing the wrong stuff and now I am even lucky to be out here writing for The Beat, which has become a part of my life living here. Now that many of the days pass by, it won't hurt if I won't be mad, and I'd go back to the camp but hope I won't have to go cause I'll be leaving by the end of April, only if I control what I'm doing. But how can I control the madness? My mind will be there till the end of the light.

-Chico

From The Beat: Don't let the staff get the best of you. Sometimes it's madness being there in JJC, but you have to believe that things will get better, and that you will get out soon. Stay up!

Violating Probation

The dumbest thing I ever did is to start violating my probation. I was still cool but everything started going wrong after I violated. After that first time I started to just not care anymore. I kept messing up. But now when I get out I'm going to be smart so I can finish probation and do what I do, that way I can't get that much time for little things. Another stupid thing I did was finish six months from an eight-month commitment and then run for a home pass, but now I get out next week.

-Carlos

From The Beat: Sometimes we make simple and dumb mistakes that really cost us in the long run. You'll get out soon, but we hope you learned from this experience.

A Smile

My most difficult challenge is yet the most simple...to smile. To smile when the sun is out, as well as to smile when it's down, to smile to my past, my present, to my future, to smile when there is no more me. Because a smile is sometimes the only thing you can do to beat the blues. For me, the most difficult thing to do is to smile when it's probably the most simple thing to do.

-Henry

From The Beat: Don't be afraid to smile! It is a very powerful form of expression, and connects you to others. Smile when you are happy, smile when you are sad.

I Wish I Hadn't

The dumbest thing I ever did was rob a man for \$80 with a fake plastic gun. At the time I was in a world of anger, now I am locked up and full of danger. I didn't want to do it at first but friends pushed me to do the worse. Now I know what juvenile hall is like and I can't even go home tonight. Gotta wait until Saturday to use the phone and Tuesday to see if I am going home.

-Kevin

From The Beat: Definitely not smart. Sometimes our friends pressure us to do things we know are wrong. What could you have done to take yourself out of that situation?

Caught Up

When I walk in the door
 In the middle of the night,
 I know there is gonna be a light
 And most likely there will also be a fight.
 I'm feeling pretty good right now,
 So instead I creep around,
 Trying not to make a sound.
 My dog greets me with a loud howl.
 So now I prepare myself for some denial.

-Alisha

From The Beat: Thanks for sharing your story of denial and why you are in it. Don't you think it might be easier to avoid the fights and the creeping around by not getting caught up in the first place?

Getting Caught By Mom

One time I came home super high and my mom caught me. It was about mid-last year and I was chilling with my homies.

They were posted up at the homies' pad, we had about \$150 so we decide to buy a half ounce of drugs. It was me and two other homies, just smoking our minds away.

We started at about 6:30pm and we finished around 9pm. By this time I was blown away, then my mom calls my cell and tells me to be home by 9:30pm.

I tell her "okay mom, yo estoy caminando para la casa," meaning I am walking home already. But I was lying to her. I was stuck on my homies' couch.

I went home at about 10:45pm. When I got home, my mom looked at me and then she noticed my eyes, then she was like "porque tienes los ojos tan rojos?" meaning why are my eyes red. I told her that I was swimming at a homies' house.

Then she asked why I wasn't wet. I didn't know what to say cause I was too high to think straight. That was the last time I ever went home high again.

-Tonio

From The Beat: Your mom will always worry about you and she always knows when something is not right. Hopefully you learned your lesson.

Dumb Thing

The dumbest thing I ever did was not doing my community service hours. That has landed me in the hall.

My mom was on me about it but I just ignored her. All I had was eight hours left but I didn't do them so I got a warrant.

It probably is the best thing that could ever happen to me cause it opened my eyes and made me realize that I need to get my priorities straight.

-Ronnie

From The Beat: We commend you for realizing your priorities. But did it really have to take getting locked up for you to open your eyes? We also want to say that compared to many others, you were given the rare option of doing community service rather than going straight to juvenile hall.

One Wish

If I Had
One wish
I would wish
To be a tear
From your eye.
To live on
Your cheek
And to die
On your
Lips.

-Haleemah

From The Beat: Beautiful sentiment, but this is a lot to sacrifice for someone else, what about you and your life?

I Shouldn't Have

The dumbest thing I ever did was rob someone in the alley for \$3. I didn't get anything out of it but a bad conscience and a big Jack in the Box burger that lasted for like three minutes and some \$1 tacos. But it wasn't worth it because I could have panhandled \$3. Now I had the cops on my back and I had to get home, it was already 1AM in the morning.

-Joshua

From The Beat: Geez that wasn't very a smart thing to do. What pushed you to put yourself and someone at risk?

Don't Do Dumb Things

The dumbest thing I did was get intoxicated and was chilling at the wrong place. So one day I was hanging with a couple homies, then we did a beer run and had a lot of pistols and had some coke. We started to do a lot of drinking and sniffing. So after all that we were hanging out and stayed up all night. Then it was about 6am and I was hungry so I went to the store. That was a dumb mistake, to go and hurt someone and on top of that it was in front of a cop and then I tried to run, but since I was so intoxicated, I fell and I almost got tazed.

That was a pretty dumb thing for me to do. For all those people that don't drink, that's good. But if you do that stuff, try your hardest to stop because it can control your mind and make you do dumb stuff so if you get this message, stop and be drug free because that's the way I want to be.

-Binky

From The Beat: You're right Binky, alcohol and drugs will make you do crazy, outrageous, unthinkable things. You also have to take into consideration the friends you hang out with because they might impair your thinking as well. We hope this never happens to you again.

To The Grave

You are an imposter
I am a monster
Born with a mother
Lived without a father
Top of the charts
First on the roster
To go to group home or foster
Life with no doubt
Break the cycle
Of in and out
Need to change my ways
Cause I've been locked up for days
My mind's a haze
So ready set blaze
Fed up and crap faced
Gots to change my ways
Or take it to the grave

-Bolt

From The Beat: Very nice poem. We're sorry to hear life has not been that easy for you. Maybe in your next poem, you can write about how you will change your ways.

Regretting It

There are a lot of stupid things I have done, but the one that tops everything is turning my back on my family. In November of 2007 is when it all started. If only I hadn't smoked, drank or disrespected my parents. I was a runaway. Every time I would run away, some reasons would be understandable and others wouldn't. It seems like officers, counselors and parents all read the same manual on "teens" cause they all say the same thing, like "Why run? You only got a year or so just wait it out." Now that I'm here I should have listened. Now I'm in here without one letter from my family and I long to see one of my younger sisters. It's the worse and dumbest thing I ever did and I regret it to the fullest. Gotta keep my head up and my heart strong.

-Circle C

From The Beat: Sometimes we have to make our own mistakes in order to realize that we need to make serious changes in our life. Now that you have arrived at this point, what changes will you make?

No One To Guide Me

The most difficult thing I have been through (and is still the most difficult thing for me) is having to guide myself. Ever since my father got put up in the pen, everything changed.

I started to smoke and do illegal things and gangbang. I started doing wrong things because my dad wasn't there to keep me in check and guide me to be on track. That might sound like a dumb reason but that's what it is and that's real. Before my dad got locked up, he used to give me a schedule.

I used to go to school then come home and do my homework, then clean, then eat and maybe have time to play outside. If not you know I would get smacked with the belt. I used to get mad but I now realize that that was what kept my life together.

Now I am in and out of juvi and the camp. And man it's hard, especially when you live in a bad environment.

-Nino

From The Beat: Just because your dad is not there to keep you in check doesn't mean you can't keep yourself in check. You can! You can create your own routine or schedule, share it with a friend or adult mentor, and have that friend or mentor help you stick to it.

Benefit Me

What's Beat, man this shhh is weak. I'm already to get windy and get to county jail because I am finna turn eighteen and I'm trynna be in the weak hall because challenge getting weaker and weaker.

I rather go to county jail and just finish the rest of my time in there because nothing in here is benefit me. I don't care and I'm listening to none of this because I'm never changing. I'm doing the same things I was doing and I can't wait to get back to Vallejo.

What they have to do is just send me to the county so I can just do time without the staff always gotta be on me.

-Mille

From The Beat: People don't want to give up on you as fast as you want to give up on yourself, and your options for your future. If you give up you know what will happen, if you try you might get hurt—again—but you'll have a future. You're stronger than you know.

The Truth that I Reveal

I denied smoking it all along...

Knowing it was wrong...

Now it really has a hold on me...

It's real no fantasy...

This is the truth that I reveal...

Never made it a big deal...

Puff puff pass how long would it last...

Everything happened so fast...

-Traviesa

From The Beat: We've known many people whose lives have been seriously affected by the "hold" this has on them. It affects their decisions, their wallet, their motivation and their coping strategies and skills. They found they didn't make changes they needed to for their lives—because they could just smoke instead.

Change

I aint tryna change

Im a keep it real

They could take me off the streets

But the beast wasn't part of the deal

Ima all ways hold my ground

Never leave the battle field

Only a real ninja could understand how I feel

Suckas who can't hang change

Cause they soft like play dough

I told my moms I'm a goon

So what I gotta change fo

To stack a million dollars is my mission

And to forever be loyal to my ninjas

-Young Keak

From The Beat: We actually believe it's the other way around. Change requires great courage and strength. The battlefield is the easy way out.

My Most Difficult Challenge

Sup wit it Beat? Today Ima drop a few lines. Being in the hall is not my worst challenge. Ever since 07' I been in and out of this facility. The way I was brought up got me caught up in this ways.

I deal and face my consequences. I don't blame no one for my mistakes or the paths that I take—one of the biggest challenge I face is to live another night. But for now and then, till my time comes, I remain on my toes.

-Baby L

From The Beat: If one of your biggest challenges is to just live another night, how can you plan for your future? It seems too stressful to have to face this challenge on a daily basis. If you could create a future without this threat what would you like to do?

I Had A Dream

I had a dream, a rope came down and I climbed the rope. Less than ten mins I was at home smoking with my folks.

I'm thinking about how I got away and then I woke up in my bed at the house. Then I realize dream come true, I'm out!!!

-Pooh

From The Beat: So in your life now, what can you do to climb up out of your cell, and not come back?

So Dumb

Wassup Beat. The dumbest thing I ever did was trust this guy that I found out was my cousin, even though we had previous problems—fought and everything but I found out he was ma cousin so we squashed it.

I thought it was all good then we got into a fight with some other dudes and he straight snitched on me and moved to Texas. I aint never seen him since—had to do three weeks in the hall for it and take the blame for my other cousin he snitched on.

-Jesse

From The Beat: After that happened did you change your outlook about who you trust, or don't? It seems you never felt close to this guy, but then thought because you were related that mattered more than how you felt.



I Don't make Eye Contact

I always deny my substance abuse problem because my mom always confronts me when I'm high but she knows I'm high because I don't make eye contact but when I'm sober I do make eye contact and have a conversation with my mom. Now I think that I shouldn't get high.

-Happy Feet

From The Beat: Will you be able to stay clean when you are released?

When I'm Ripped

The dumbest thing I ever did that I can remember right now is probably in October when I got hella perked and I was just getting home from the hood and the cops were there and I tried to fight them and ended up with a face full of concrete. HaHaHa that was funny.

Now that I be thinking about it tho I be doin hecka hot shhh when I'm ripped like hoppin over counters at restaurants and tryina to fight the cashier and tryina just do hecka shhh. But at least I be having fun tho. Well that's all I got for now so I'll see yall next week .

-Krazy

From The Beat: We wonder what is fun about "a face full of concrete?" Sometimes drama masquerades as fun. Are you an alcoholic?

The Screw-Up

The dumbest thing I ever did was pointed a weapon at my step dad's head. At the time it seemed like the thing to do, but now I realize that it wasn't. I had to learn the hard way.

Drugs had a big influence in the situation, but then again drugs had a big influence on my life. At the age 12 stuff took a turn for the worst when my father dies. Ever since then I've been a screw-up.

-J

From The Beat: We are sorry for the loss of your father. It's lucky you realize that your father's death affects you so much—and that your feelings are big and sometimes out of control. Weapons and drugs are a dangerous combo.

I'm So Dumb

The dumbest thing I ever did was real mainey. When I was in the 5th grade everyday this girl come up to me and ask me do I want her doh, you know me I'm not gone say no so I took it. And every single day she came up to me.

So one day she came up to me and I was HELLA mad and I just took all her chippas and after the end of the day I was doin it live at like thirty five dollars in my pocket, when I was young that was lot of money. For me it felt like I had like two hundred or something, I was real juiced that day, but the next day her big brother came or somethin' I was spooked. I would of chopped em but I was too little.

After that day I still broke her for doh cause I was in the 5th grade I didn't know no better at the time, but I'm gone in a minute.

-Rashawn

From The Beat: We feel dumb too 'cause we don't really know what's going on here. However, it sounds like too much to deal with in 5th grade. Do you know better now? What are you planning to do when you are released? Have you learned from your mistakes?

Keep It Lit

When Im loaded or smackin I don't deny nothing. I keep it lit when people ask me if Im on. I keep it lit & I tell em yeah. I don't go around tellin people I'm high but when people ask me why, I say what I put in my body don't hurt nobody but my body.

Im not an addict, I just like to party. My mom be knowin when I'm high. She doesn't condone it but she doesn't really say nothing when I'm tilted tho. Most people know how I get down. This is what I do & there is nothing you can do. That's why they call me the overdose.

-Juice Tha Overdose

From The Beat: We think it's a dangerous game, especially to call yourself that. Haven't you ever heard "be careful what you wish for?" It doesn't only affect you, what hurts you hurts your Mom...and who knows who else.

I Couldn't Have Done it Myself

I've done some stuff in the past, but this has been my most challenging.. I've done exactly 6 months and some change and finally getting out next week... I would have never gotten threw it if it wasn't from staff I would've gotten kicked out..

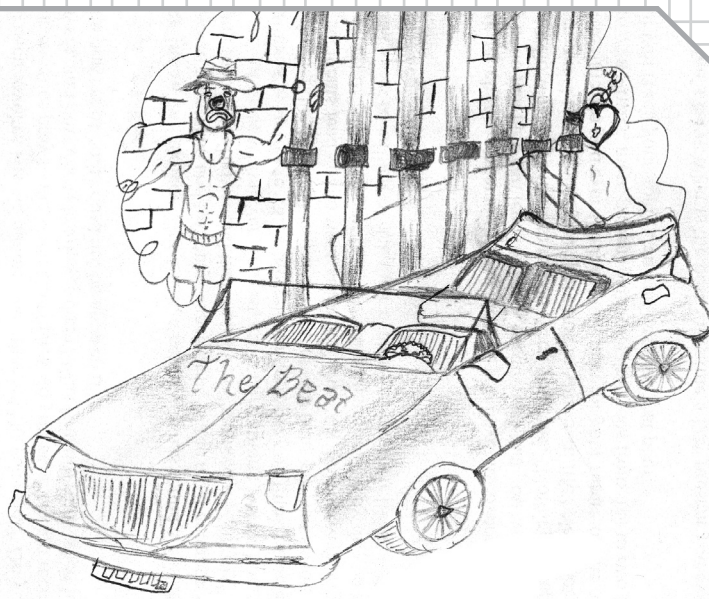
I want to thank my psychiatrist for helping me with medication, I never thought I needed until I got here. I guess I forgot the phrase "nobody's perfect". I want to thank the supervisors and my p.o. for keeping me, and not terminating me completely.

I want to thank Ms. Cellones, to me she was the definition of New Foundations, she really works with kids and their troubles, don't stop doing what you doing. I want to thank Mr. Herman, I thought we were going to go on more outings than I thought but, at least we came out.. Mr. Jones is the type of counselor, that he doesn't want you lying to him, but if you are willing to work with yourself he'll work with you. Ms. Alan also was a good counselor.

Mrs. Wise was a fun counselor, she'll make stuff like bingo, and football pool and make root beer floats, and too Mr. Wells he was a counselor of few words to me, but he was koo. Thanks with helping with this challenge, I couldn't done it myself...

-Luis

From The Beat: It's good to appreciate those who help you. We are glad you found allies on your journey. We wish you really good luck with your future!



I Got Caught

The dumbest thing I ever did was when I got caught for a gun. I was walking down the block in I saw the cops so I run but my gun fell out my pants so I picked it up and kept running but when I hit the gate the cops were right there, so I threw the gun and they didn't see me--but some girl told the cops that I had a gun but they didn't find it, but the girl told them were it was so they put me in the cop car.

-Yo Boy

From The Beat: For a dumb thing it has serious consequences. We don't like the many ways guns hurt people. You were hurt because you thought you needed it, because you were arrested for it, even because someone felt they had to tell on you about it. At least no one was shot or killed.

Battlefields Behind The Walls

I'm caught in a world
 a place in time where freedom is no more
 A place where the homies put in work behind closed doors
 Where eyes are open, mouths are shut
 Where you wake to the bells and fire it up!
 A place where hearts are frozen cold
 Where shoes stay on with your mattress rolled
 Where you watch your back to stay alive
 A place where only the strong survive
 A place where you push pull and strive
 To keep the flame and struggle alive
 A place where if I ever got killed
 Putting it down on the battle field
 Let it be known let it be heard
 I'll fly to heaven on a bird
 I'm caught in a world a place in time
 Where freedom is no more
 But I'll always be till the day I die
 and can't breathe no more!

To The Beat Within

First, I'd like to extend my utmost love and respect to y'all in full. Sorry is a sorry word, but my bad I haven't got to y'all sooner. It's just that I have been having a lot of shhh on my mind.

Why? 'Cause I'm shaking this spot soon, as I'm going home back to East Oakland, CA. I'll be leaving at the end of this month, so I want to send ya' something before I bounce. Also I'd like to say thank you for publishing "Forbidden Folks" on volume 13.43. I highly appreciate that. Here are two more! 1. "Battlefields Behind The Walls" 2. "People like me."

As for now let me close on how I started with extending my utmost love and respect to y'all in full. Much love respect...

Our next writer is back with a bang after he took a little break to get his mind right, as we can only imagine how difficult that may be, especially when you're surrounded by a negative environment. Our boy Steve-O always comes through with some thoughtful writing and hopefully everyone can learn something from the words he speaks. Writing to us from Deuel Vocational Institution in Tracy, CA, Steve-O shares with us a couple poems!

A place where only the strong survive

A place where you push pull and strive

People Like Me

I live to please myself inside
 So I creased down my clothes
 and spoke down mi ride
 But why must it be
 all people I see
 Is nothing but trouble in people like me
 We're only human like all of the rest
 So we go around doing what we do best
 We do it with pride
 But we are often look down at
 'cause we like to low-ride
 Whenever we're out away from the pad
 That's when the jealous
 Seem to get out mad
 We're spotted where ever near or far
 By the way we dress or just by the car
 Jealous.... don't see us having fun
 They see us killing or robbing someone
 We.... To have hearts and hearts that are true
 We.... laugh and we cry like most people do
 We're only homeboys,
 "sound" scary too you!
 If so watch out, 'cause there are home girls too.

ROBERT ABRAHAM

Hope and Pride

What's up Beat? I truly want to thank you for sending me your weekly publications. Well the purpose in writing this piece is to disapprove all negative connotations associated with prison and to hopefully instill some hope and pride in those individuals who are locked up. Yeah there may be a lot of bull crap and hostility, deceit and pettiness, evil and hatred on the inside but those things don't have to become our natural habitat. Just because we're in concrete circumstances doesn't mean we should entertain these negative and fatalistic attitudes about ourselves, and the present situation that we happen to be in.

For those individuals now incarcerated and reading this piece. This is a time to change; a time to take all that hatred, resentment, bitterness and negative feelings toward society and turn it around. If any of you want to get even with the criminal justice system well my philosophy is "stay out of trouble." If enough convicts stay out of trouble we could put these people out of jobs. You could make incarceration

As time passes by, whether you're in your cell chilling, or in your dorm busting down a spread, you never no what is going on the outside. We know what's running through your mind. You don't wanna come back, we know. But what about all the thoughts in your head and what changes we need to make to start bettering our lives. Our friend Robert has come up with probably the most simplest, yet very powerful piece of writing ever. This is a message to all you folks out there that want to change but think that they can't change just because they feel trapped inside this system. Sending us his love and support all the way from a Correctional Facility in San Diego, CA, Robert inks the pages of our publication with a very inspirational piece!

the most positive experience in your life.

I mean you can spend all your time accepting those prison norms and values, learning to walk the walk and talk the talk, concentrating on working those yokes and letting others know how "down" you are, or you can grow up and make yourself responsible for your own destiny and do something positive for yourself. There's no greater opportunity than the time you have on the inside. Today, start a new life. Well peace out everyone.

Thanks Beat, for your time and your support. I sincerely appreciate it so very much.

The Pandora Heart, Chapter 1: Death of a Flower

Lily sat on the edge of her bed with a million thoughts running through her mind. She already had a dozen sleeping pills and a glass of water making their way through her system. She knew this as a fact; she had counted the number of pills before she took them. While the pills had long descended down her throat, she could still feel the chill of the icy cold liquid coursing its way through her system. She could feel it creeping its way down her throat slowly and filling her chest with its Arctic chill still slipping down until it finally rested in her stomach, turning her stomach into an icebox. She had made sure however to leave enough water in her glass to take the remaining twelve morphine pills she stole from her dad.

Although she was feeling weak due to the large consumption of sleeping pills, she knew she had to continue.

"No turning back now," she mumbled softly to herself.

Her mind had become flooded with thoughts of Alonzo. She could only wonder how this was going to affect him when he found out. There was obviously no way that she could keep this a secret. She cared too much about him to just leave his side, to let him suffer a great loss such as this. But she would only cause him more suffering, if she were to stay with him no matter how much they loved each other.

Oh how she wished she could see him before the eventual happened. Her mind became filled with warm joyous thoughts of her and Travis doing simple things such as movies and walking in parks, to the romantic dinners and extravagant beach getaway.

Her beautiful and fond memories of him were washed away and something hideous bubbled up to the surface and made itself known. Her warm and fuzzy thoughts and memories were replaced with the ugly and sinister thoughts of her father.

If there really was such thing as a human being the son of the devil, then his son would have to be her father. It was hard to believe that a man could be so wicked, so evil. There's simply no other way to describe him though, he was simply cruel. Just thinking about him made her clench her teeth and knuckles in anger with all the strength she could muster. This wasn't much due to the sleeping pills; they had consumed most of her energy and were steadily draining her still.

Her father was an alcoholic, addicted to almost every drug on the planet, and very abusive. There was hardly a time when her father didn't reek of swimming in the oceans of Budweiser and Jack Daniels, or a time when she didn't catch him smoking joints of marijuana, snorting grams of cocaine, popping morphine pills, smoking crack or even shooting heroin into his bloodstream. The one thing she was confused at however was how the hell he got all the drugs that he had, or even the money to sustain a life completely enslaved by drug addiction. Her father was rarely ever sober, no her father was NEVER sober.

Lily was repulsed by the very thought of the disgusting man. The man who she lived with had assaulted her almost every chance he got, most of the time for no reason at all. This man had also verbally abused her, making her believe that she was ugly and would never amount to anything just like her mother.

The sad part was that her mother was actually a prostitute. Lily had grown up a motherless child since birth. This was because her mother died giving birth to her. Even though she never knew her mother, her father told her often that she

Our next writer is our very own Mr. Torriano. For those of you who don't know him he is an inspiring young author, age 18, going to school at Berkeley High. He consistently drops by our office week in and week out, and this week he provides us with a cool short story. For y'all that don't remember he wrote the short story called "Paranoia" that was featured in our publication in two parts. Back once again with the first Chapter of his latest venture, Torriano delivers an outstanding piece of work, without question.

reminded him of her mother and that she looked just like her.

This was the only thing he had ever said to her that made her happy. Her mother was a beautiful Mexican woman that had the most gentle and serene face Lily had ever laid her eyes on. Her face looked as if it could instantly put you at peace and take your mind away from your troubles as you stared deep into her brown eyes. There were similarities between the two of them. Lily's skin was the same caramel glazed color as her mother's; they shared the same soft brown eyes and matching golden brown hair. Lily even had the same mole on her left cheek as her mother. What genes her father contributed were beyond her comprehension.

Her father had also sexually abused her and forced her to pleasure him or be assaulted with an avalanche of fists. She couldn't even count how many times he came into her room and had his way with her, over the days, years, she stopped counting. She had even discovered that he had gotten her pregnant one time and she sought to get an abortion immediately. In order to pay for the abortion she stole some of her father's drugs and sold them to get the money.

This man had left her scarred, physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Her mind body and soul forever bore the pain the man's mark had left on her. She despised him, loathed him with every inch of her core. It was because of this man that she was afraid to get close to any men at all, even the one that she loved.

Her heart pumped sorrow into her body while her eyes leaked pain and her body ached from suffering. Her thoughts were caged, her mind trapped in the bottomless empty black void known as misery, where no one can hear your cries no matter how loud they are and those who do simply ignore them.

It was now or never. She swept the pills off of the desk into the sweaty palm of her nervous shaky left hand. She slammed the palm of her hand to her mouth catapulting the pills into her mouth. She reached for the glass and swallowed the remainder of the ice-cold water and they chased the pills down her throat. With the strength that she still had left she got up and walked over to her bedroom window in the long t-shirt she wore that ended at her kneecaps. She opened the window and smiled at the cool breeze of the night as it kissed her face. She gazed up at the moon and the stars in the sky. She gazed in wonder at how peaceful they were.

She waltzed back to her bed leaving the bedroom window open. She finally lied sat down then let herself fall back to the comfort of her bed. She stared at the ceiling enjoying the cool rush of the wind against the bare skin of her arms and legs. She gripped the heart shaped locket that contained a picture of both her mother and her love Alonzo in it. While she was sad she would be leaving the other, she felt good about possibly having the opportunity to finally meet the other in afterlife. She felt tears run down her cheeks while she thought about Alonzo. Her eyelids couldn't fight the weight of sleep that was overtaking them and she finally gave in and let them have their rest.

The final whisper to escape her lips was, "I love you Alonzo, please forgive me."

With her eyes now closed she drifted off to her last sleep, where she would awake no longer. (To be continued)

Dear Beat Within

May this letter find you, staff, volunteers and our readers all in the best of health and care. I recently received my two copies of The Beat Within being on your mailing list. I am very appreciative. I am moved by all the minds of our youth, men, and women developing their voice within the pages of The Beat and I pray that I can contribute with encouragement and stimulating growth. This path is a continued development and learning experience of learning how to express self within through creative writing.

One of the most important things that has helped me, was learning how to define my meaning in life, who I am, and how I was going to continue to cultivate and develop as a being. This key factor has given me the essential direction and focus I needed and desired to competently direct myself becoming independent, assertive and most importantly psychologically free, where I learned how to not arrest my self or limit myself within my mind and heart or permit out side factors to defeat me or arrest me as well, regardless of being incarcerated.

I learned how to overcome my pride and false pride that has kept me limited within my mind and heart that affected every other aspect of my life and set myself up for failure and a defeated life, until I learned how to look within myself and weed it out, becoming my personal mental gardener. It took some time because there were some things I did not wish to lose or let go of quite so quickly because I did not want to change some of those things about myself, being honest with myself. I had to separate myself from all that I had ever been seeded with or assumed that was, who I was, am or supposes to be!

Once I was able to distinguish psychological dependent and co-dependent thoughts that I did not need in my mind and heart it helped me to release it, and seek appropriate states of being, to not lose the lush and vast richness of my ethnicity and culture, being able to recognize I am that I am.

Today, I am a man with vision and direction steady moving forward in the face of adversity in life, being the living, fighting surviving, intelligent developing being and psychologically free. I am continuing with higher education earning an Associates of Arts Degree in social and behavioral science, as well as, future courses in General Business. Furthermore, I am currently in vocational services and related technology, learning Microsoft computers to earn certification in word, access, excel and power point.

Learning how to have a vision has helped me guide direct myself having a realistic understanding of the world I am surviving within. I learned how to believe in myself and I believe in you who ever you may be reading this letter of encouragement. And I pray this has opened your heart and mind where you can look within being and honestly give your self the fighting chance you deserve by taking the initiative existentially because you can not change the past and it is important that you do not permit the past to prevent you from becoming who you can truly become, once you learn to look within to have vision without. We have to make it happen by continued work and development. It is not beyond anyone who puts it into affect. Do not let any one rob you of this type of opportunity, especially you yourself!

I am going on twenty-three years of being in prison, and state and federal prisoners do not receive aid for college. We have to rake the initiative by applying our self individually, and do not waist precious time while you're doing time, and or arrest your self with the thought of not being able to start because your locked up. Step out in continued action because if you're waiting in hope, you're wasting time to get ahead to earn what you need to survive in this world. We have to bring it into being by action. I am closing two motivational poems and look forward to sharing more in the immediate future. Stay strong, focused and directed, especially when you don't feel like it. Keep that analytical mind on the forefront always for discernment regardless of the emotions we'll experience being human. It's natural.

Native Mexican American from Southern California, Johnny Rodriguez steps up to the plate and swings his mighty bat (pen), and aims for the fences with his inspirational piece of writing. Johnny not only delivers two powerful pieces of writing, he also informs us about his struggles and how some of you young writers inspire him to keep pushing and do all the positive things that he is doing right now. Sending us his writing from Calipatria State Prison in Calipatria, CA, we thank our friend, and look forward to hearing from him again.

I Till Within

A tiller I am clearing and digging roots out from within
 that seeds of preservation hungers of light
 Gray and dark understand may take sound root
 That I may harvest bountifully throughout my being
 And life's choices and decisions

Filling spaces of old doctrine and customs not losing the lush
 And vast richness of my ethnicity and culture
 By fortifying my present and future harvest
 With empowerment of knowledge throughout my life seedlings.

Lyrics To My Melody

My life was just a melody until you filled with the lyrics that I've learned to express you, us, and all we've shared or will share in life together or separated.

It's a song that has made me cry out and smile more than you might care to know, and it most definitely made me mad, sad, and cry of heart break, loss, loneliness, and emptiness of things too numerous to mention and or express.

I believe that you've shared this song with me too at those precise moments or I wish you have, for you know that you are not alone in all that has been lived between us, or possibly will be.

The most beautiful thing that my heart continues to humble me with is this continued melody that I have, before you had ever came into my life and it's been that melody that's an everyday melody of perseverance and of being the survivor I am regardless of what I'll experience or live. It's a gift to me from my parents.

And it has made me cry out loud with joy laugh, smile and, yes frown and feel mad, sad, and cry, but this melody will never leave me, for it's mine until I die, and it will die with me, me being who I am; not knowing first hand about the after life it may continue eternally, but until then it's my melody that we've shared together even when I did not wish to share it with you at times and or you with me. And have fused and created with you, combining our melodies together that has been with me longer than you'll ever know or can imagine it has.

I look forward to a new song and melody of us, you, me and everything else may it be a better song and melody filled with soundness, understanding, and most of all love and respect for one another. We'll cry out loud with joy at times, laugh, smile, frown, and understand we'll get mad, sad and cry of loss, loneliness, and of emptiness, being left behind, alone, because of our own personal choices and decisions, circumstances beyond our control and or because of people out of our control, or of life alone.

What ever it may be I'm prepared as I'll ever be. Because I wish to share this life and melody of mine with you.

Empyrean

A pen and a pad is all I had until I met you
 And you turned my skies from dark to blue
 Erased the clouds and brought the sun
 To light a weary soul
 You brought me out of the rain and dried me with the breeze
 of your kiss
 Suspended in your love my being carouses in your bliss
 I sleep in empyrean
 Loathing to be disturbed by the sycophants of hate
 Eager to beguile me away from your servitude
 The slovens whisper capricious mantras into my ears
 Gambits I know all too well
 Their lying, baiting, waiting for me to stumble
 To trap me into their hell
 My feet know well that rueful path
 Full of lies, infidelity and no trust
 Pain and anguish lay in heaps upon that road
 A place where you found me
 Lonely, broken and cold

So how could I once again travel down that road?
 My soliloquy of that path has been printed
 Those roads of illusion I exorcise
 Visceral actions no longer dictate my way
 In a furor I broke those bonds
 Unsteady and dubious I journeyed on
 Hungry, inept and lost
 I stumbled upon the morbid fruition of those souls gone
 astray
 Seduced into the abysmal forest of their lust
 Maligned by their greed
 And their appetite for pleasure
 Lust
 There I feel broken and crushed
 With ink stained tablet in hand
 Etched in canvas a tale of a broken man
 Fallen from grace here I lay
 Broken and unable to stand
 And then you saved me
 An angel bearing light in the midst of my hell
 Your scintilla lit an adage to burn within my heart
 "Love is not love until you love yourself"
 A pen and a pad is all I had until I met you
 And you turned my skies from dark to blue
 Erased the clouds and brought the sun
 To light a weary soul
 You brought me out of the rain and dried me with the breeze
 of your kiss
 Suspended in your love my being carouses in your bliss
 I sleep in you
 In empyrean.

Simple Things

It's the simple things that bring a smile
 Some ice cream on your prison tray
 A 68-degree day in the middle of winter
 Waking up right before a wet dream
 A card with nothing but your woman's signature at the
 end
 Or your daughter's shriek of delight and laughter at seeing
 your face in the visiting room
 A picture drawing from your son with the words "You're
 the best Dad!" scribbled beneath
 Even though you haven't been home in eight years
 Man that shhh can also bring you to tears
 But as you've experienced
 LOVE IS LOVE.

Our next writer is a real talented writer filled with a lot of deep emotions to express. It ain't no joke to be locked up doing some hard time in the pen away from all your family and loved ones, away from your significant other, kids, etc. You get nostalgic and some of us learn to appreciate what we have instead of complaining about the things that we don't have. Our skilled writer William brings up a good point saying that there's absolutely nothing wrong with expressing your love to someone. It doesn't make you less of a man. It does make you more mature. Sending us some of his wisdom all they way from a Correctional Facility in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, William lets us know what he's feeling!

Cycle of Life

Flowers die
 Thunder roars as lightening chases the rain
 And your pain dissolves
 With each drop my tears wash away the past and cleanse
 your soul
 Rocks crumble, hailstones clatter upon the window
 pane
 As the earth spins off its axis and your heart is healed
 While strands of your dirty blond, is not brown hair cling
 to my sweating frame
 We are oblivious to the world dying around us as we
 create
 Life.

Love

Some say love is that thing strangles from afar
 Creates scars and abrasions of the heart
 Breaks hopes and shatters dreams
 You see love ain't always what it seems
 Still, some say love is that thing which creates bliss
 Ecstasy
 And is served romantically like a dish of your favorite
 dessert
 Sweet to the lips that sample its fruit
 Love is more delightful the deeper the roots
 Love is love.

Hello Beat

Thank you for publishing my works in your latest issue, it made me feel good to see my name in your publication. Knowing that I have a talent and great potential, but above all this knowing that others will read my works and feel my pain and be able to relate, learn and grow from some of the life experiences that I have been through.

In this world I find that the essential element of life is becoming extinct. LOVE is missing from the lives of so many people and this is a great atrocity. It should not be this way, and when you are incarcerated that lack of love is all the more evident. So to all the incarcerated bodies and minds across the country I want you all to know that even though I do not know you I LOVE YOU.

To the youths I want you all to know that there should not be any shame in showing a person that you love them. You're not a punk, sissy or sucker for expressing love. No, expressing love shows your maturity and makes you a real man or woman. So do you, and do not let others pressure you into being someone you are not. And above all else love yourself, because if you cannot love yourself, than you cannot love anyone else.

Enjoy these random poems on love that I put together, until next time...

A New Beginning

When I said, "I love you" I thought you would understand
 For I planted you, watered you and fed you love, as best I can
 I sheltered you from the storms and the suns scorching heat
 As you grew I planted a stick right next to you to help you stand
 But I am only a man
 Who has his own vices, demons and faults
 So when my cultivation of you was cut short due to the bondage of my carnal ways
 I knew it would be a test for you to flourish lovingly until your end of days
 Yet you fought off the weeds, who sprung up to pull you down
 To steal your essence and destroy your life
 You discovered within yourself that you held a gift
 An uncanny ability to create food from light
 And as life drugged me down and beat me up
 You photosynthesized and you grew up
 As I stumbled through my broken dreams and these hate filled streets
 A familiar aroma of love cut through my stench
 My high wore off as quickly as it came
 And upon the image my eyes settled on my tears I could not restrain
 For there you were
 A multicolored rose so beautiful and free from the concrete of which you grew
 While my tears fell your leaves and roots absorbed my pain
 Then you reached out and caressed my face
 And when your petals graced my lips
 Your pistils reached down into my soul
 And fed on all the sorrow, hate and bitterness which had decayed my heart
 In exchange you pumped into me a love of life
 And I was transfixed as if I touched by God himself
 No longer a slave unto myself
 Forgiven I grafted you into my heart
 Now we exist as one
 For your love has given me a brand new start.

Tears With My Emotions

I don't know if it makes sense
 But still I try
 These are my tears mixed with emotions
 That formulate sentences
 Created by words engineered from a partially disturbed mind
 Caused by a ruptured mental state
 Due to the anxiety created by being separated from love
 Which is the fruition of my selfish desires gone unfilled
 In an attempt to get what I want
 By deliberately ignoring what speaks so plainly and true
 YOU!
 Running from your love
 Tripped up
 Entangled in a snare that led to bondage
 When all I had to do was
 Stop
 And receive what I had been running from
 Your LOVE
 And allow it to satiate me.



Teardrops and Shattered Dreams

Eyes
 Sit here and watch
 Day after day
 Weeks turn into years
 Friends?
 Are all windblown
 Scattered
 I am the prisoner's tears
 Tangible
 Wet or tatted upon faces
 Right below eyes
 Abrasions left upon scarred hearts and empty souls
 The footprint of humanity is inhumane
 Minds' bearing up under oppression leaves us close to insane
 I am the pain
 That's embedded within these hollow hearts and hope torn souls
 My words are the prayers and curses that they speak
 My hope is the arms with which they reach
 Out to love ones pleading for love
 Or unto the system judicial
 Begging for another shot at freedom
 "I swear to God I'm changed
 I'm a new man
 I will never do dirt again!"
 But they heard it all before
 And it doesn't matter if you're sincere or not
 Case closed
 Appeal, parole, love and freedom denied
 I am the tears they cry.

A Poem For Boonie

Never in a million dreams did you dream you would wake up this way
 Hearing chow call, yard, count and lights out; keys jingling, guards rotating
 Telling you what your life is all about, "If you don't like it then don't come here!"
 "Oh really?" Really, and that shhh is for real!
 So mad on the inside that you would kill if you could get away with it
 But nah Boonie, "Breathe, Relax, Aim, Squeeze," Kill these fools in a different way
 How 'bout we kill them with kindness, we kill them with love
 Proverbs 25:21-22 States
 "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the Lord will reward you."
 I know it is hard and you struggle with pride
 But don't sweat the small stuff, let the bullshhh ride
 And when their talking shit and Satan's trying to get you vexed remember
 "A soft answer turns away warmth, but harsh words stir up anger." Proverbs 15:1
 And pride goes before the fall, so remain humble
 And you won't have to worry about apologizing and stumbling all through this life
 Or watching your back looking out for strife
 Just stick with this plan simple and plain
 And with all that other bullshhh just simply refrain
 Now when a dead wrong person wants to be right
 Acknowledge that with a, "You know what, you're right"
 And don't say it all snippy and with an attitude
 Just keep on stepping, enjoying your mood.

A Hit Of Hope

Rainy days are here again
 As I wake up in this cell
 Cold
 Sweat dripping from forehead to chin
 In my mind echoes the remnants of a dream just had
 A dream deferred
 As sorrow strums my heart like a harp played out of tune
 I need to be fixed with a fix
 Just a small hit, maybe one line of your love
 Injected through needle point or rolled up and inhaled
 Shhh, I just want to be held
 Engulfed in your arms, head on your bosom with you rubbing my back
 Baby, like only you can do, but that dream has yet to come true
 While I sit up in camp, on this hill, behind these walls
 Paying dues for all my flaws
 So lonely, angry and cold with inmates and C.O's snickering
 Wolves in sheep's clothes, they want me to unfold
 Hang myself out there on that line, like linen
 With the breeze I dry out, while I cry out for you
 Without your loving touch what would I do?
 But be like a junkie at the end of his rope
 About to slit his wrist over dope
 Bashing in windows on smash and grab just so he can purchase himself some hope
 Yeah?!!! I'm hanging and just before I go through it all again
 Before my tears fall again
 I get a letter from you, saying baby be strong because I love you.

Time For Change

I'm boxed in everywhere I turn
 Nowhere to run, I guess now it's time to learn
 Now more running, running from the mistakes in my past
 Time for me to drink this cup and grow at last
 Change will come and it's a tough pill to swallow
 Yet once you do there's only one path to follow
 No more wallowing in sorrow and despair
 I learned to live with my regrets and stepped out from fear
 Once I matured that box seemed so small
 My mental took over demanding, "just kick down the wall"
 Restraints of the world can't hold me now
 I was chained in the past but now I'm going to stay free
 So I have to walk before I run, because those traps don't care
 Get caught going too fast have me stuck back in despair
 And I care too much to go back down that road
 So I pay attention and listen, allowing God to take control
 I am older now youthful dreams have faded
 Yet I still have hope because love is created
 A new path and a dream to desire
 Do I take hold and let love lift me higher
 To a state that I once couldn't see because I was only in love with me
 Now the blinders have been lifted and I am able to be
 A man made ready to love thee.





Locked Up

All I've got are my visions
 Trying to calculate ways to execute my own missions
 Coming from a low place where stackin' bread was the issue
 But if you get shot today, ain't nobody gonna miss you
 My deep past in contrast to the things that I've learned
 Got me focused on all of the strong bridges I've burned
 Incarcerated, I'm packin', the tool I'm lackin' is patience
 I need to slow it on down, instead I', actin' all anxious
 Every day is a war, I'm fighting for self-preservation
 In hopes of one day it'll be the air of freedom I'm tastin'
 Chasin' dreams, escaping reality when I can
 All I've got is my pride, I will remain a man
 Educating myself, slowly evicting my ignorance
 If I've got a big problem, I break it down and I figure it
 This here life is a lesson, a blessin' given from God
 If I stumble and fall, I pick it up and restart
 The library, my sanctuary with thousands of books
 I keep reading when I'm receiving these venous looks
 From characters that I think it's a game and ain't realized
 I'm a man, there's no doubt when you look in these eyes
 I rise to the test when cowards puff up their chest
 Devour one and I'm sending a message to all of the rest
 Avoiding conflicts ain't easy for convicts
 When paranoia and stress is what causes this nonsense
 The soul of a prison is power and control
 I'm telling you people, really it never grows old
 Simply the story is told bold with truth as it essence
 I'm only speakin' my truth but I hope you're feeling my message.

-JG

Our next group of writers have been dazzling us since we first started printing their poetry in *The Beat Within* last year! Free Minds published a very powerful book of the writings that come out of their weekly workshops in the Washington DC County Jail, for young men being tried as adults. This is the last entry from the book, as we have published their whole poetry book in little excerpts in *The Beat Without*. So for the last time we get to indulge ourselves into some heartfelt writings from Washington DC! We look forward to hear from Free Minds in the coming weeks, given we share an office with them in DC.

Leaving Here

I'm not coming back
 It's bad
 I can't do the things I want to do
 Like sleep on my comfortable bed
 Have a TV in my room
 Or walk to the refrigerator
 I feel like trash
 I'm in a filthy, trashy place
 People want to throw me away
 People want to not see me.

-GL

Now or Never

Do it right now
 Or don't do it at all
 Like Michael Jordan
 I am just not as tall
 I'm something like the sun
 I keep rising, but I will never fall
 When I get out there
 I plan to do the right thing
 No more hustling
 No more bling-bling
 I plan to get a job
 No more wasting money on Sob
 I hope to get money the legal way
 No longer want to rob
 Now or never
 I am my own man
 I believe I can fly
 In any kind of weather.

-DR

•RALPH D. OFFIELD•

Letting Go

It's hard for me to look in the mirror
 And see the man that I've become
 My eyes full of hate and my mouth a loaded gun
 Like a concrete wall my anger just blew right through it
 But once you pull the trigger
 It's hard to take back the bullets
 I was always afraid
 That one day you were gonna leave me like this
 But I guess I should have thought about that
 Before my loving hands became a fist
 You never coming back isn't so hard to believe
 Because after what I put you through
 Even I wouldn't come back to me

I'm home to a man I don't even know
 Holding onto your ghost in a bed so cold
 Praying to God not to let go
 Afraid of dying because the devil has my soul

I awoke the next day to my answering machine
 A frightened, yet familiar, voice started talking to me
 And she said:

Our next writer is a "think outside the box" kind of writer, because his topics range from all different issues that might not be related to him, but may be some of y'all can relate. To, Ralph D. Offield sends us a poem from Western Missouri Correctional Center in Cameron, MO., for the women who feel they have to stay in an abusive situation for the children.

It's hard for me to look in the mirror
 And see the man that you've become
 My eyes are full of fear and my face bruised and numb
 Like a concrete wall, your hands pushed me right through it
 If I would have had a gun last night
 I would have pulled the trigger and used all them bullets
 I was never worried that one day
 I was gonna have to leave you like this
 I gave you everything
 My love, my trust, and you betrayed me and destroyed it!
 I'll never come back and you won't make me see to believe
 Because if I did...
 Your next time might be the last your so called
 love would backfire and kill me!

I left home to a man I don't even know
 Holding onto a love that's so bitterly cold
 Praying to God for strength and not let my weakness show
 And to give me the courage just to let go!

A plan for me

And now I can see clear enough to know that God has a plan for me. What the plan is as of yet, I don't know. But I know God will let his plan unfold for my life in his own timing. And that time will be testing of my patience. And when I was young and I did not know much better, I did not understand God's plans for my life.

I didn't understand the works of God. I know now that God let me go through so much hardship for a reason. He was training me for his plan. He gave me this time and space in prison to get know him better. So I could have faith in the plan he had for me.

We Want More Than We Need

I'm not trying to be a judge of the people in this world. When I speak of these matters, I speak of myself as well. But for some reason I always seem to want more then I really need. It is just something about the ways of this world that condition people to be greedy for the gain of material things that don't last forever. And we tend to have the attitude as if worldly possession is the greatest good and highest values in life. We waste our minds and time, trying to get all the money and worldly possession we can get. And come to find out from living and having, these things don't last at all.

People just don't understand that we got God on our side. What more do we need? Having God on our side is like having every thing in the world Because God will bless us with what we need. And when he sees we are thankful for just the little things. He would bless us with more. But living is not just about having more and more. It's about being content with just the things we need.

Stop before it's too late

It pains me to see all the young people in "The Beat Within" headed down the same road I did. I grew up filled with anger and hatred and quickly turned to a life of drugs and violence.

It started in (Las) Vegas. A robbery went bad and I skipped town. Got to California and "had" to rob another car. By the time I finally went back to Vegas they went looking for me. They knew who I was. Nevada has no CYA so at sixteen I was tried as an adult and sentenced to prison.

After six years in prison, I thought I was getting paroled, only to be picked up by San Bernardino and sentenced to another dozen plus years.

One day of crimes changed my entire life. I can never give back the years I've lost or the years to come. Over the years I've changed my life completely. I'm a priest and author, a husband, a step father and a better man than the boy I started out as, but my life is limited to the walls and towers that confine me. I could've got life. I'm grateful every day that I could take back what I did.

I urge all you kids who are reading this whether you are in Juvie, youth prison, or outside. Think hard before you continue doing what your doing. It only takes a second to ruin your life. To those who're doing a little time right now, use it to better yourself. You can change, but you have to want it. To live righteously, is to live every day trying to be just a little better than you were yesterday.

Blessed be...

Our next writer should be a familiar name with a lot of you cats that have been in tuned with our publication for the last few issues. Michael hardly misses an issue as he always delivers outstanding and well thought out pieces of writing. He preaches and teaches himself and others through his writing as he takes note of various issues that affect us on a daily basis. Sending us his impeccable work from Union Correctional Institution in Raiford, Florida, Michael once again blesses us with some words of wisdom!

Being in Prison

Being in prison can sometime be a gift for some people. And being in prison can be a nightmare for some people. I have been in prison for almost twenty years this time. And the first time I did three years in prison. But I did not learn anything from that small stay in prison. But now I have enough insight and experience in doing time to know that being in prison is not all bad. And I have met some smart and good people in prison who used they prison time to better themselves in so many ways: Mind body and soul. And made a life for them self right here in prison, because it's not where you are. It's who you are.

I see fools around me that can't do no time in prison. And they can't stand to be in prison. And they always talk about how much they are ready to get out. But only in they own minds they are ready. But some of them get right out and get killed. Some of them get right out and come right back to prison. It's so sad. But it's the truth and I feel that for a lot of people, prison, or being in prison, has saved a lot of people's lives. Some people have hard time making it in that outside world. Some are just at they best in prison. I done seen some people who do so good in prison, then get right out and go back to the same life style, that got them into prison the first time. Some get out and go back to the drug game.

The bible tells in the book Genesis how Jacob's son Joseph's is taken to Egypt as a Hebrew slave. He was lied on and Joseph went to prison. And the man who ran the prison was pleased with Joseph so he put him in charge of all the other prisoners. And while Joseph was in prison, God was with him. And in prison, God gave Joseph success in everything he did.

VOODOO

Our next writer is slowly crawling back into The Beat limelight with some great writing for us to absorb. His fist piece is just to inform y'all about his beliefs, and how easily people mistake them, thanks to Hollywood and rumors. But his second piece titled, "Stop Before It's Too Late," is a brilliant piece of writing that not only gives a glimpse of Voodoo's life before he got incarcerated, but also how he shifted his actions into positive ones. Writing to us from California Correctional Institution in Tehachapi, CA, Voodoo gives us a dose of advice and a glimpse of his life!

Whichcraft Is Misunderstood

In volume 13.45 article "The Night Of the Witch" you stated that science and witches are not on the same page. I beg to differ. I am an ordained Priest of Wicca, which is a very positive and very healing path. Witchcraft is based on scientific principles. The belief in such things isn't any stranger than the belief in the Christian God.

To a Wicca, doing a spell really isn't any different than a Christian doing a prayer. As witches we believe in God, we just understand the concept of God in a different way than Christians do. We don't curse people nor do we need to feed on the pain of others to achieve anything.

There are many biased opinions about Wicca and witchcraft, mostly due to ignorance and Hollywood. I hope one person at a time I can bring the true nature of my beliefs to light. With love and light.

Can the Rich People Put Themselves In the Shoes of the Poor?

Last week a news reporter began a mouth experience, having to live on only \$6.28 a day. Do you think he/she will have a better understanding of what life is like for those who have to struggle to put food on the table? If DA's, PO's, PD's or judges had to spend a little time locked-up, do you think it would make them less likely to put young people there? Can "rich people" learn about the experiences of the "poor people" by putting yourself in their shoes?

What would they learn is not judging us by how they see us living in the hood, or having a hard time looking for jobs, because how they only judging us on how we look. We don't have the right clothes on because we don't have any money. We can't have food to feed our family or help other people. But most importantly we can't even help to feed our self.

We have to steal from the store without paying for things because we don't have any money to pay for necessities like medicine to make our babies feel better when they get sick. The "rich people" saying we killed somebody because we look like that person that did it, so we spending time locked-up and going to court saying we didn't do anything. We are trying to stay out of jail and get P.o's coming in our house at 4 or 5 o' clock so we can stay out of trouble.

We're having a hard time paying our rent and trying to keep up with other people and keeping our stuff on(lights, heat, etc.) in the house so we can take shower or eat or to

We're proud to present our next writer as a brand new contributor to our publication. Tamika has been interning with us for a couple of months now and has been very active in writing and participating in weekly workshops that can voice her opinion on how we can make changes in our community. Now for the first time she gives us a piece that we can publish which dictates reasons why it's so hard to live in poverty and be successful. Tamika is a Junior at Lowell High School in San Francisco, CA.

see. It's just not the people who live in the hood it's people all over the country. The poor people are trying to live the life of the "rich people." But the rich is taking the money and raising the rent and the bills up high so we have a hard time.

If the people that have jobs are only getting paid \$6.28 a day, that can only help them with a little something to put in their house or just get them or their baby something to eat. I hope they understand what we go through to put food on our table because sometime we don't have enough food to feed our family so we have to struggle trying to feed our whole family. I hope the "rich people" can spend a week in our shoes so they can see what we are talking about or what we are going through in our life.

Our friends getting locked-up their family can't help them get bail, can't pay their bills, they have their P.o. calling to see if you in the house at the right time. Rich people don't worry about the same troubles that us poor folks have to deal with. They don't have to steal food to feed their family. So they don't have to struggle. They would learn how we struggle and how we have a hard time living or trying to have a life. So they will see how we live in what the rich people call life.

Why

When I was a child I got kidnap by some people my mother had trusted when we moved from Missouri to Los Angeles. In the 70's people got busted, me, my brother, and sister ended up in the system foster homes. The people that took us said that my mom was unfit and this is why mother had a hard time getting us back. Most kids have to deal with the street life unconsciously. Running away from the system trying to get back to my mama, the thought and the terror of not ever knowing about myself.

It can lead minority to fair hope, chance and change. I was a black man living in a Chicano world. My friends made me strong. They looked out for me. When the generation changed and a misunderstanding became a very dumb racial issue. "Why haven't my homies at least try to look out for me?"

I been in Prison in Missouri for the last 20 years. After I got out of CTA (California Youth Authority) it took me to step out the hood to find myself. Real street homies have a sense of care, respect, loyalty, dignity, and self-pride to go back to the hood and help one kid find himself.

I get out soon. I was always a revolutionary gang banger 'cause my mother couldn't stop her drug problem. Why our people cant see the real problem? Even though we got a black President now I see it's hard on the yard still. People want to see me fall coming out of prison. people want to see the President to feel the rich can't understand young people are hungry. The hood is all they know, why? When you do help someone, the same person wait for a chance to stab you in the back why? Nobody cares anymore it's everyman for himself.

That's why I found the key self...

EDMOND NELSON

Our next writer is a new contributor to our publication as he's barely starting to get the feel for what The Beat is about. He writes us a piece that explains a little bit about himself and what he thinks about the younger generation. Writing to us from South Central Correctional Center in Licking, Missouri, Edmond enlightens us with his perceptions about the game and the so called homies.

Dear Beat

I'm Edmond Nelson. Hood name Lomitas. I write this letter because I'm liking The Beat booklet you send out to kids and different people in Prison. I guess it's around the world. California does have a little influence in other hoods even outside the county. Everybody gots a little low-rider in them.

I'm from that second generation of locos in L.A with a history of staying down going for what I know is right in the hood. Can't no one take it from me.

Since I been here in Missouri I got a chance to meet my real family; found myself educated my mentality. I'm more conscious of people and things to do with being the person I am.

I get out soon. "I wrote an autobiography of my life being black in a Mexican gang and what I found here in Missouri is that's the last place free of slavery. Last to vote for a black president and the hood dudes out here are sick with envy and can't ride for what's real.

If any of you want to get even with the criminal justice system well my philosophy is “stay out of trouble.” If enough convicts stay out of trouble we could put these people out of jobs. You could make incarceration the most positive experience in your life.

read the rest of Robert Abraham's BWO piece on page 47

